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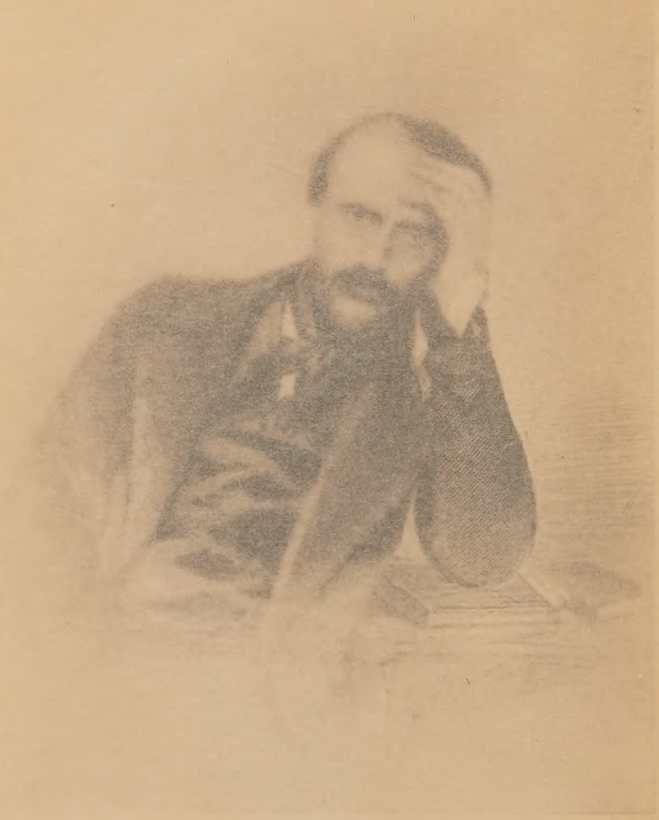
THE WORKS OF GEORGE MEREDITH

MEMORIAL EDITION

VOLUME

VIII



Giuseppe Mazzini

GEORGE MEREDITH

VITTORIA

VOL. II

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1910

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GIUSEPPE MAZZINI . . . . . *Frontispiece*

From a picture by J. Henshaw, engraved by Hy. Meyer.

COMO . . . . . *Facing page* 154

From a drawing by Geo. Barnard, engraved by A. Willmore.

VITTORIA

VOL. II

CHAPTER XXVII

A NEW ORDEAL

THE old city of Meran faces Southward to the yellow hills of Italy, across a broad vale, between two mountain-walls and torrent-waters. With one hand it takes the bounding green Passeyr, and with the other the brown-rolling Adige, and plunges them together in roaring foam under the shadow of the Western wall. It stands on the spur of a lower central eminence crowned by a grey castle, and the sun has it from every aspect. The shape of a swan in water may describe its position, for the Vintschgau and the stony Passeyrthal make a strong curve on two sides as they descend upon it with their rivers, and the bosom of the city projects, while the head appears bending gracefully backward. Many castles are in view of it; the loud and tameless Passeyr girdles it with an emerald cincture; there is a sea of arched vineyard foliage at his feet.

Vittoria reached the Castle of Sonnenberg about noon, and found empty courts and open doors. She sat in the hall like a supplicant, disregarded by the German domestics, who beheld a travel-stained humble-faced young Italian woman, and supposed that their duty was done in permitting her to rest; but the duchess's maid Aennchen happening to come by, questioned her in moderately intelligible Italian, and hearing her name gave a cry, and said that all the company were out hunting, shooting, and riding, in the vale below or the mountain above. 'Ah, dearest lady, what a fright we have all been in about you! Signora Piaveni has not slept a

wink, and the English gentleman has made great excursions every day to find you. This morning the soldier Wilhelm arrived with news that his master was bringing you on.'

Vittoria heard that Laura and her sister and the duchess had gone down to Meran. Countess Lena von Lenkenstein was riding to see her betrothed shoot on a neighbouring estate. Countess Anna had disappeared early, none knew where. Both these ladies, and their sister-in-law, were in mourning for the terrible death of their brother, Count Paul. Aennchen repeated what she knew of the tale concerning him.

The desire to see Laura first, and be embraced and counselled by her, and lie awhile in her arms to get a breath of home, made Vittoria refuse to go up to her chamber, and notwithstanding Aennchen's persuasions, she left the castle, and went out and sat in the shaded cart-track. On the winding ascent she saw a lady in a black riding habit, leading her horse and talking to a soldier, who seemed to be receiving orders from her, and presently saluted and turned his steps downward. The lady came on, and passed her without a glance. After entering the court-yard, where she left her horse, she reappeared, and stood hesitating, but came up to Vittoria and said bluntly, in Italian:—

'Are you the Signorina Campa, or Belloni, who is expected here?'

The Austrian character and colouring of her features told Vittoria that this must be the Countess Anna or her sister.

'I think I have been expected,' she replied.

'You come alone?'

'I am alone.'

'I am Countess Anna von Lenkenstein; one of the guests of the castle.'

'My message is to the Countess Anna.'

'You have a message?'

Vittoria lifted the embroidered cigar-case. Countess Anna snatched it from her hand.

'What does this mean? Is it insolence? Have the kindness, if you please, not to address me in enigmas. Do you'—Anna was deadly pale as she turned the cigar-case from side to side—'do you imagine that I smoke, par hasard?' She tried to laugh off her intemperate manner of speech; the laugh broke at sight of a blood-mark on one corner of the case; she started and said earnestly, 'I beg you to let me hear what the meaning of this may be?'

'He lies in the Ultenthal, wounded; and his wish was that I should deliver it to you.' Vittoria spoke as gently as the harsh tidings would allow.

'Wounded? My God! my God!' Anna cried in her own language. 'Wounded?—in the breast, then! He carried it in his breast. Wounded by what? by what?'

'I can tell you no more.'

'Wounded by whom?'

'It was an honourable duel.'

'Are you afraid to tell me he has been assassinated?'

'It was an honourable duel.'

'None could match him with the sword.'

'His enemy had nothing but a dagger.'

'Who was his enemy?'

'It is no secret, but I must leave him to say.'

'You were a witness of the fight?'

'I saw it all.'

'The man was one of your party!'

'Ah!' exclaimed Vittoria, 'lose no time with me, Countess Anna, go to him at once, for though he lived when I left him, he was bleeding; I cannot say that he was not dying, and he has not a friend near.'

Anna murmured like one overborne by calamity. 'My brother struck down one day—he the next!' She covered her face a moment, and unclosed it to explain that she wept for her brother, who had been murdered, stabbed in Bologna.

'Was it Count Ammiani who did this?' she asked passionately.

Vittoria shook her head; she was divining a dreadful thing in relation to the death of Count Paul.

'It was not?' said Anna. 'They had a misunderstanding, I know. But you tell me the man fought with a dagger. It could not be Count Ammiani. The dagger is an assassin's weapon, and there are men of honour in Italy still.'

She called to a servant in the castle-yard, and sent him down with orders to stop the soldier Wilhelm.

'We heard this morning that you were coming, and we thought it curious,' she observed; and called again for her horse to be saddled. 'How far is this place where he is lying? I have no knowledge of the Ultenthal. Has he a doctor attending him? When was he wounded? It is but common humanity to see that he is attended by an efficient doctor. My nerves are unstrung by the recent blow to our family; that is why—— Oh, my father! my holy father!' she turned to a grey priest's head that was rising up the ascent, 'I thank God for you! Lena is away riding; she weeps constantly when she is within four walls. Come in and give me tears, if you can; I am half mad for the want of them. Tears first; teach me patience after.'

The old priest fanned his face with his curled hat, and raised one hand as he uttered a gentle chiding in reproof of curbless human sorrow. Anna said to Vittoria, coldly, 'I thank you for your message': she walked into the castle by his side, and said to him there: 'The woman

you saw outside has a guilty conscience. You will spend your time more profitably with her than with me. I am past all religious duties at this moment. You know, father, that I *can* open my heart. Probe this Italian woman; search her through and through. I believe her to be blood-stained and abominable. She hates us. She has sworn an oath against us. She is malignant.'

It was not long before Anna issued forth and rode down to the vale. The priest beckoned to Vittoria from the gates. He really supposed her to have come to him with a burdened spirit.

'My daughter,' he addressed her. The chapter on human error was opened:—'We are all of one family—all of us erring children—all of us bound to abnegate hatred: by love alone are we saved. Behold the Image of Love—the Virgin and Child. Alas! and has it been visible to man these more than eighteen hundred years, and humankind are still blind to it? Are their ways the ways of comfort and blessedness? Their ways are the ways of blood; paths to eternal misery among howling fiends. Why have they not chosen the sweet ways of peace, which are strewn with flowers, which flow with milk?'—The priest spread his hand open for Vittoria's, which she gave to his keeping, and he enclosed it softly, smoothing it with his palms, and retaining it as a worldly oyster between spiritual shells. 'Why, my daughter, why, but because we do not bow to that Image daily, nightly, hourly, momently! We do not worship it that its seed may be sown in us. We do not cling to it, that in return it may cling to us.'

He spoke with that sensuous resource of rich feeling which the contemplation of the Image does inspire. And Vittoria was not led reluctantly into the oratory of the castle to pray with him; but she refused to confess.

Thereupon followed a soft discussion that was as near being acerb as nails are near velvet paws.

Vittoria perceived his drift, and also the dear good heart of the old man, who meant no harm to her, and believed that he was making use of his professional weapons for her ultimate good. The inquisitions and the kindness went musically together; she responded to the kindness, but rebutted the inquisitions; at which he permitted a shade of discontent to traverse his features, and asked her with immense tenderness whether she had not much on her mind; she expressing melodious gratitude for his endeavours to give her comfort. He could not forbear directing an admonishment to her stubborn spirit, and was obliged, for the sake of impressiveness, to speak it harshly; until he saw, that without sweetness of manner and unction of speech, he left her untouched; so he was driven back to the form of address better suited to his nature and habits; the end of which was that both were cooing.

Vittoria was ashamed to tell herself how much she liked him and his ghostly brethren, whose preaching was always of peace, while the world was full of lurid hatred, strife, and division. She begged the baffled old man to keep her hand in his. He talked in Latinized Italian, and only appeared to miss the exact meaning of her replies when his examination of the state of her soul was resumed. They sat in the soft colour of the consecrated place like two who were shut away from earth. Often he thought that her tears were about to start and bring her low; for she sighed heavily; at the mere indication of the displacement of her hand, she looked at him eagerly, as if entreating him not to let it drop.

'You are a German, father?' she said.

'I am of German birth, my daughter.'

'That makes it better. Remain beside me. The silence is sweet music.'

The silence was broken at intervals by his murmur of a call for patience! patience!

This strange scene concluded with the entry of the duchess, who retired partly as soon as she saw them. Vittoria smiled to the old man, and left him: the duchess gave her a hushed welcome, and took her place. Vittoria was soon in Laura's arms, where, after a storm of grief, she related the events of the journey following her flight from Milan. Laura interrupted her but once to exclaim, 'Angelo Guidascarpi!' Vittoria then heard from her briefly that Milan was quiet, Carlo Ammiani in prison. It had been for tidings of her lover that she had hastened over the mountains to Meran. She craved for all that could be told of him, but Laura repeated, as in a stupefaction, 'Angelo Guidascarpi!' She answered Vittoria's question by saying, 'You could not have had so fatal a companion.'

'I could not have had so devoted a protector.'

'There is such a thing as an evil star. We are all under it at present, to some degree; but he has been under it from his birth. My Sandra, my beloved, I think I have pardoned you, if I ever pardon any one! I doubt it; but it is certain that I love you. You have seen Countess Anna, or I would have told you to rest and get over your fatigue. The Lenkensteins are here—my poor sister among them. You must show yourself. I was provident enough to call at your mother's for a box of your clothes before I ran out of wretched Milan.'

Further, the signora stated that Carlo might have to remain in prison. She made no attempt to give dark or fair colour to the misery of the situation; telling Vittoria to lie on her bed and sleep, if sleep could be persuaded to visit her, she went out to consult with the

duchess. Vittoria lay like a dead body on the bed, counting the throbs of her heart. It helped her to fall into a state of insensibility. When she awoke, the room was dark; she felt that some one had put a silken cushion across her limbs. The noise of a storm traversing the vale rang through the castle, and in the desolation of her soul, that stealthy act of kindness wrought in her till she almost fashioned a vow upon her lips that she would leave the world to toss its wrecks, and dedicate her life to God.

For, O heaven! of what avail is human effort? She thought of the Chief, whose life was stainless, but who stood proscribed because his aim was too high to be attained within compass of a mortal's years. His error seemed that he had ever aimed at all. He seemed less wise than the old priest of the oratory. She could not disentangle him from her own profound humiliation and sense of fallen power. Her lover's imprisonment accused her of some monstrous culpability, which she felt unrepentingly, not as we feel a truth, but as we submit to a terrible force of pressure.

The morning light made her realize Carlo's fate, to whom it would penetrate through a hideous barred loop-hole—a defaced and dreadful beam. She asked herself why she had fled from Milan. It must have been some cowardly instinct that had prompted her to fly. 'Coward, coward! thing of vanity! you, a mere woman!' she cried out, and succeeded in despising herself sufficiently to think it possible that she had deserved to forfeit her lover's esteem.

It was still early when the duchess's maid came to her, bringing word that her mistress would be glad to visit her. From the duchess Vittoria heard of the charge against Angelo. Respecting Captain Weisspriess, Amalia said that she had perceived his object in wishing

to bring the great cantatrice to the castle; and that it was a well-devised audacious scheme to subdue Countess Anna:—'We Austrians also can be jealous. The difference between us is, that it makes us tender, and you Italians savage.' She asked pointedly for an affirmative, that Vittoria was glad to reply with, when she said: 'Captain Weisspriess was perfectly respectful to you?' She spoke comforting words of Carlo Ammiani, whom she hoped to see released as soon as the excitement had subsided. The chief comfort she gave was by saying that he had been originally arrested in mistake for his cousin Angelo.

'I will confide what is now my difficulty here frankly to you,' said the duchess. 'The Lenkensteins are my guests; I thought it better to bring them here. Angelo Guidascarpi has slain their brother—a base deed! It does not affect you in my eyes; you can understand that in theirs it does. Your being present—Laura has told me everything—at the duel, or fight, between that young man and Captain Weisspriess, will make you appear as his accomplice—at least, to Anna it will; she is the most unreasoning, the most implacable of women. She returned from the Ultenthal last night, and goes there this morning, which is a sign that Captain Weisspriess lives. I should be sorry if we lost so good an officer. As she is going to take Father Bernardus with her, it is possible that the wound is serious. Do you know you have mystified the worthy man exceedingly? What tempted you to inform him that your conscience was heavily burdened, at the same time that you refused to confess?'

'Surely he has been deluded about me,' said Vittoria.

'I do but tell you his state of mind in regard to you,' the duchess pursued. 'Under all the circumstances, this is what I have to ask: you are my Laura's guest, there-

fore the guest of my heart. There is another one here, an Englishman, a Mr. Powys; and also Lieutenant Pierson, whom, naughty rebel that you are, you have been the means of bringing into disgrace; naturally you would wish to see them: but my request is, that you should keep to these rooms for two or three days: the Lenkensteins will then be gone. They can hardly reproach me for retaining an invalid. If you go down among them, it will be a cruel meeting.'

Vittoria thankfully consented to the arrangement. They agreed to act in accordance with it.

The signora was a late riser. The duchess had come on a second visit to Vittoria when Laura joined them, and hearing of the arrangement, spurned the notion of playing craven before the Lenkensteins, who, she said, might think as it pleased them to think, but were never to suppose that there was any fear of confronting them. 'And now, at this very moment, when they have their triumph, and are laughing over Viennese squibs at her, she has an idea of hiding her head—she hangs out the white flag! It can't be. We go or we stay; but if we stay, the truth is that we are too poor to allow our enemies to think poorly of us. You, Amalia, are victorious, and you may snap your fingers at opinion. It is a luxury we cannot afford. Besides, I wish her to see my sister and make acquaintance with the Austrianized Italian—such a wonder as is nowhere to be seen out of the Serabiglione and in the Lenkenstein family. Marriage is, indeed, a tremendous transformation. Bianca was once declared to be very like me.'

The brow-beaten duchess replied to the outburst that she had considered it right to propose the scheme for Vittoria's seclusion on account of the Guidascarpi.

'Even if that were a good reason, there are better on the other side,' said Laura; adding, with many little

backward tosses of the head, '*that* story has to be related in full before I denounce Angelo and Rinaldo.'

'It cannot be denied that they are assassins,' returned the duchess.

'It cannot be denied that they have killed one man or more. For you, Justice drops from the bough: *we* have to climb and risk our necks for it. Angelo stood to defend my darling here. Shall she be ashamed of him?'

'You will never persuade me to tolerate assassination,' said the duchess, colouring.

'Never, never; I shall never persuade you; never persuade—never attempt to persuade any foreigner that we can be driven to extremes where their laws do not apply to us—are not good for us—goad a subjected people till their madness is pardonable. Nor shall I dream of persuading you that Angelo did right in defending her from that man.'

'I maintain that there are laws applicable to all human creatures,' said the duchess. 'You astonish me when you speak compassionately of such a criminal.'

'No; not of such a criminal, of such an unfortunate youth, and my countryman, when every hand is turned against him, and all tongues are reviling him. But let Angelo pass; I pray to heaven he may escape. All who are worth anything in our country are strained in every fibre, and it 's my trick to be half in love with any one of them when he is persecuted. I fancy he is worth more than the others, and is simply luckless. You must make allowances for us, Amalia—pity captive Judah!'

'I think, my Laura, you will never be satisfied till I have ceased to be Babylonian,' said the duchess, smiling and fondling Vittoria, to whom she said, 'Am I not a complaisant German?'

Vittoria replied gently, 'If they were like you!'

'Yes, if they were like the duchess,' said Laura, 'nothing would be left for us then but to hate ourselves. Fortunately, we deal with brutes.'

She was quite pitiless in prompting Vittoria to hasten down, and marvelled at the evident reluctance in doing this slight duty, of one whose courage she had recently seen rise so high. Vittoria was equally amazed by her want of sympathy, which was positive coldness, and her disregard for the sentiments of her hostess. She dressed hesitatingly, responding with forlorn eyes to Laura's imperious 'Come.' When at last she was ready to descend, Laura took her down, full of battle. The duchess had gone in advance to keep the peace.

The ladies of the Lenkenstein family were standing at one window of the morning room conversing. Apart from them, Merthyr Powys and Wilfrid were examining one of the cumbrous antique arms ranged along the wall. The former of these old English friends stepped up to Vittoria quickly and kissed her forehead. Wilfrid hung behind him; he made a poor show of indifference, stammered English and reddened; remembering that he was under observation he recovered wonderfully, and asked, like a patron, 'How is the voice?' which would have been foolish enough to Vittoria's more attentive hearing. She thanked him for the service he had rendered her at La Scala. Countess Lena, who looked hard at both, saw nothing to waken one jealous throb.

'Bianca, you expressed a wish to give a salute to my eldest daughter,' said Laura.

The Countess of Lenkenstein turned her head. 'Have I done so?'

'It is my duty to introduce her,' interposed the duchess, and conducted the ceremony with a show of its embracing these ladies, neither one of whom changed her cold gaze.

Careful that no pause should follow, she commenced chatting to the ladies and gentlemen alternately, keeping Vittoria under her peculiar charge. Merthyr alone seconded her efforts to weave the web of converse, which is an armistice if not a treaty on these occasions.

'Have you any fresh caricatures from Vienna?' Laura continued to address her sister.

'None have reached me,' said the neutral countess.

'Have they finished laughing?'

'I cannot tell.'

'At any rate, we sing still,' Laura smiled to Vittoria. 'You shall hear us after breakfast. I regret excessively that you were not in Milan on the Fifteenth. We will make amends to you as much as possible. You shall hear us after breakfast. You will sing to please my sister, Sandra mia, will you not?'

Vittoria shook her head. Like those who have become passive, she read faces—the duchess's imploring looks thrown from time to time to the Lenkenstein ladies, Wilfrid's oppressed forehead, the resolute neutrality of the countess—and she was not only incapable of seconding Laura's aggressive war, but shrank from the involvement and sickened at the indelicacy. Anna's eyes were fixed on her and filled her with dread lest she should be resolving to demand a private interview.

'You refuse to sing?' said Laura; and under her breath, 'When I bid you not, you insist!'

'Can she possibly sing before she grows accustomed to the air of the place?' said the duchess.

Merthyr gravely prescribed a week's diet on grapes antecedent to the issuing of a note. 'Have you never heard what a sustained grape-diet will do for the bullfinches?'

'Never,' exclaimed the duchess. 'Is that the secret of their German education?'

'Apparently, for we cannot raise them to the same pitch of perfection in England.'

'I will try it upon mine. Every morning they shall have two big bunches.'

'Fresh plucked, and with the first sunlight on them. Be careful of the rules.'

Wilfrid remarked, 'To make them exhibit the results, you withdraw the benefit suddenly, of course?'

'We imitate the general run of Fortune's gifts as much as we can,' said Merthyr.

'That is the training for little shrill parrots: we have none in Italy,' Laura sighed, mock-dolefully; 'I fear the system would fail among us.'

'It certainly would not build Como villas,' said Lena.

Laura cast sharp eyes on her pretty face.

'It is adapted for caged voices that are required to chirrup to tickle the ears of boors.'

Anna said to the duchess: 'I hope your little birds are all well this morning.'

'Come to them presently with me and let our ears be tickled,' the duchess laughed in answer; and the spiked dialogue broke, not to revive.

The duchess had observed the constant direction of Anna's eyes upon Vittoria during the repast, and looked an interrogation at Anna, who replied to it firmly. 'I must be present,' the duchess whispered. She drew Vittoria away by the hand, telling Merthyr Powys that it was unkind to him, but that he should be permitted to claim his fair friend from noon to the dinner-bell.

Laura and Bianca were discussing the same subject as the one for which Anna desired an interview with Vittoria. It was to know the conditions and cause of the duel between Angelo Guidascarpi and Captain Weisspriess, and whither Angelo had fled. 'In other words, you cry for vengeance under the name of justice,'

Laura phrased it, and put up a prayer for Angelo's escape.

The countess rebuked her. 'It is men like Angelo who are a scandal to Italy.'

'Proclaimed so; but by what title are they judged?' Laura retorted. 'I have heard that his duel with Count Paul was fair, and that the grounds for it were just. Deplore it; but to condemn an Italian gentleman without hearing his personal vindication, is infamous; nay, it is Austrian. I know next to nothing of the story. Countess Ammiani has assured me that the brothers have a clear defence—not from your Vienna point of view: Italy and Vienna are different sides of the shield.'

Vittoria spoke most humbly before Anna; her sole irritating remark was, that even if she were aware of the direction of Angelo's flight, she would not betray him.

The duchess did her utmost to induce her to see that he was a criminal, outlawed from common charity. 'These Italians are really like the Jews,' she said to Anna; 'they appear to me to hold together by a bond of race: you cannot get them to understand that any act can be infamous when one of their blood is guilty of it.'

Anna thought gloomily: 'Then, why do you ally yourself to them?'

The duchess, with Anna, Lena, and Wilfrid, drove to the Ultenthal. Vittoria and Merthyr had a long afternoon of companionship. She had been shyer in meeting him than in meeting Wilfrid, whom she had once loved. The tie between herself and Wilfrid was broken; but Merthyr had remained true to his passionless affection, which ennobled him to her so that her heart fluttered, though she was heavily depressed. He relieved her by letting her perceive that Carlo Ammiani's merits were not unknown to him. Merthyr smiled at Carlo for abjuring his patrician birth. He said: 'Count Ammiani

will be cured in time of those little roughnesses of his adopted Republicanism. You must help to cure him. Women are never so foolish as men in these things.'

When Merthyr had spoken thus, she felt that she might dare to press his hand. Sharing friendship with this stedfast nature and brotherly gentleman; who was in the ripe manhood of his years; who loved Italy and never despaired; who gave great affection, and took uncomplainingly the possible return for it;—seemed like entering on a great plain open to boundless heaven. She thought that friendship was sweeter than love. Merthyr soon left the castle to meet his sister at Coire. Laura and Vittoria drove some distance up the Vintschgau, on the way to the Engadine, with him. He affected not to be downcast by the failure of the last attempt at a rising in Milan. 'Keep true to your Art; and don't let it be subservient to anything,' he said, and his final injunction to her was that she should get a *German* master and practise rigidly.

Vittoria could only look at Laura in reply.

'He is for us, but not of us,' said Laura, as she kissed her fingers to him.

'If he had told me to weep and pray,' Vittoria murmured, 'I think I should by-and-by lift up my head.'

'By-and-by! By-and-by I think I see a convent for me,' said Laura.

Their faces drooped.

Vittoria cried: 'Ah! did he mean that my singing at La Scala was below the mark?'

At this, Laura's laughter came out in a volume. 'And that excellent Father Bernardus thinks he is gaining a convert!' she said.

Vittoria's depression was real, though her strong vitality appeared to mock it. Letters from Milan, enclosed to the duchess, spoke of Carlo Ammiani's im-

prisonment as a matter that might be indefinitely prolonged. His mother had been subjected to an examination; she had not hesitated to confess that she had received her nephew in her house, but it could not be established against her that it was not Carlo whom she had passed off to the sbirri as her son. Countess Ammiani wrote to Laura, telling her she scarcely hoped that Carlo would obtain his liberty save upon the arrest of Angelo:—'Therefore, what I most desire, I dare not pray for!' That line of intense tragic grief haunted Vittoria like a veiled head thrusting itself across the sunlight. Countess Ammiani added that she must give her son what news she could gather;—'Concerning *you*,' said Laura, interpreting the sentence: 'Bitter days do this good, they make a proud woman abjure the traditions of her caste.' A guarded answer was addressed, according to the countess's directions, to Sarpo the bookseller, in Milan. For purposes of such a nature, Barto Rizzo turned the uneasy craven to account.

It happened that one of the maids of Sonnenberg was about to marry a peasant of Meran, part proprietor of a vineyard, and the nuptials were to be celebrated at the castle. Among those who thronged the courtyard on the afternoon of the ceremony, Vittoria beheld her faithful Beppo, who related the story of his pursuit of her, and the perfidy of Luigi;—a story so lengthy, that his voluble tongue running at full speed could barely give the outlines of it. He informed her, likewise, that he had been sent for, while lying in Trent, by Captain Weisspriess, whom he had seen at an inn of the Ultenthal, weak, but improving. Beppo was the captain's propitiatory offering to Vittoria. Meanwhile the ladies sat on a terrace, overlooking the court, where a stout fellow in broad green braces and blue breeches lay half across a wooden table, thrumming a zither, which set the groups in motion.

The zither is a melancholy little instrument; in range of expression it is to the harp what the winchat is to the thrush; or to the violin, what that bird is to the nightingale; yet few instruments are so exciting: here and there along these mountain valleys you may hear a Tyrolese maid set her voice to its plaintive thin tones; but when the strings are swept madly there is mad dancing; it catches at the nerves. 'Andreas! Andreas!' the dancers shouted to encourage the player. Some danced with vine-poles; partners broke and wandered at will, taking fresh partners, and occasionally huddling in confusion, when the poles were levelled and tilted at them, and they dispersed. Beppo, dancing mightily to recover the use of his legs, met his acquaintance Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz, and the pair devoted themselves to a rivalry of capers; jump, stamp, shuffle, leg aloft, arms in air, yell and shriek: all took hands around them and streamed, tramping the measure, and the vine-poles guarded the ring. Then Andreas raised the song: 'Our Lady is gracious,' and immediately the whole assemblage were singing praise to the Lady of the castle. Following which, wine being brought to Andreas, he drank to his lady, to his lady's guests, to the bride, to the bridegroom, —to everybody. He was now ready to improvize, and dashed thumb and finger on the zither, tossing up his face, swarthy-flushed: 'There was a steinbock with a beard.' Half-a-dozen voices repeated it, as to proclaim the theme.

'Alas! a beard indeed, for there is no end to this animal. I know him'; said the duchess dolefully.

'There was a steinbock with a beard;
Of no gun was he afeard:
Piff-paff left of him: piff-paff right of him:
Piff-paff everywhere, where you get a sight of him.'

The steinbock led through the whole course of a moun-

taineer's emotions and experiences, with piff-paff continually left of him and right of him and nothing hitting him. The mountaineer is perplexed; an able man, a dead shot, who must undo the puzzle or lose faith in his skill, is a tremendous pursuer, and the mountaineer follows the steinbock ever. A sennderin at a sennhütchen tells him that she admitted the steinbock last night, and her curled hair *frizzled* under the steinbock's eyes. The case is only too clear: my goodness! the steinbock is the——. '*Der Teu . . .* !' said Andreas, with a comic stop of horror, the rhyme falling cleverly to '*ai*.' Henceforth the mountaineer becomes transformed into a champion of humanity, hunting the wicked bearded steinbock in all corners; especially through the cabinet of those dark men who decree the taxes detested in Tyrol.

The song had as yet but fairly commenced, when a break in the 'piff-paff' chorus warned Andreas that he was losing influence, women and men were handing on a paper and bending their heads over it; their responses hushed altogether, or were ludicrously inefficient.

'I really believe the poor brute has come to a Christian finish—this Ahasuerus of steinbocks!' said the duchess.

The transition to silence was so extraordinary and abrupt, that she called to her chasseur to know the meaning of it. Feckelwitz fetched the paper and handed it up. It exhibited a cross done in blood under the word 'Meran,' and bearing that day's date. One glance at it told Laura what it meant. The bride in the court below was shedding tears: the bridegroom was lighting his pipe and consoling her: women were chattering, men shrugging. Some said they had seen an old grey-haired hag (*hexe*) stand at the gates and fling down a piece of paper. A little boy whose imagination was alive with the tale of the steinbock, declared that her face was awful, and that she had only the use of one foot. A man patted

him on the shoulder, and gave him a gulp of wine, saying with his shrewdest air: 'One may laugh at the devil once too often, though!' and that sentiment was echoed; the women suggested in addition the possibility of the bride Lisa having something on her conscience, seeing that she had lived in a castle two years and more. The potential persuasions of Father Bernardus were required to get the bride to go away to her husband's roof that evening: when she did make her departure, the superstitious peasantry were not a merry party that followed at her heels.

At the break-up of the festivities Wilfrid received an intimation that his sister had arrived in Meran from Bormio. He went down to see her, and returned at a late hour. The ladies had gone to rest. He wrote a few underlined words, entreating Vittoria to grant an immediate interview in the library of the castle. The missive was entrusted to Aennchen. Vittoria came in alarm.

'My sister is perfectly well,' said Wilfrid. 'She has heard that Captain Gambier has been arrested in the mountains; she had some fears concerning you, which I quieted. What I have to tell you, does not relate to her. The man Angelo Guidascarpi is in Meran. I wish you to let the signora know that if he is not carried out of the city before sunset to-morrow, I must positively inform the superior officer of the district of his presence there.'

This was their first private interview. Vittoria (for she knew him) had acceded to it, much fearing that it would lead to her having to put on her sex's armour. To collect her wits, she asked tremblingly how Wilfrid had chanced to see Angelo. An old Italian woman, he said, had accosted him at the foot of the mountain, and hearing that he was truly an Englishman—'I am out of my uniform,' Wilfrid remarked with intentional bitterness—

had conducted him to the house of an Italian in the city, where Angelo Guidascarpi was lying.

'Ill?' said Vittoria.

'Just recovering. After that duel, or whatever it may be called, with Weisspriess, he lay all night out on the mountains. He managed to get the help of a couple of fellows, who led him at dusk into Meran, saw an Italian name over a shop, and—I will say for them that the rascals hold together. There he is, at all events.'

'Would you denounce a sick man, Wilfrid?'

'I certainly cannot forget my duty upon every point.'

'You are changed!'

'Changed! Am I the only one who is changed?'

'He must have supposed that it would be Merthyr. I remember speaking of Merthyr to him as our unchangeable friend. I told him Merthyr would be here.'

'Instead of Merthyr, he had the misfortune to see your changeable friend, if you will have it so.'

'But how can it be your duty to denounce him, Wilfrid? You have quitted that army.'

'Have I? I have forfeited my rank, perhaps.'

'And Angelo is not guilty of a military offence.'

'He has slain one of a family that I am bound to respect.'

'Certainly, certainly,' said Vittoria hurriedly.

Her forehead showed distress of mind; she wanted Laura's counsel.

'Wilfrid, do you know the whole story?'

'I know that he inveigled Count Paul to his house and slew him; either he or his brother, or both.'

'I have been with him for days, Wilfrid. I believe that he would do no dishonourable thing. He is related——'

'He is the cousin of Count Ammiani.'

'Ah! would you plunge us in misery?'

'How?'

'Count Ammiani is my lover.'

She uttered it unblushingly, and with tender eyes fixed on him.

'Your lover!' he exclaimed, with vile emphasis.

'He will be my husband,' she murmured, while the mounting hot colour burned at her temples.

'Changed—who is changed?' he said, in a vehement underbreath. 'For that reason I am to be false to her who does me the honour to care for me!'

'I would not have you false to her in thought or deed.'

'You ask me to spare this man on account of his relationship to your lover, and though he has murdered the brother of the lady whom I esteem. What on earth is the meaning of the petition? Really, you amaze me.'

'I appeal to your generosity, Wilfrid. I am Emilia.'

'Are you?'

She gave him her hand. He took it, and felt at once the limit of all that he might claim. Dropping the hand, he said:—

'Will nothing less than my ruin satisfy you? Since that night at La Scala, I am in disgrace with my uncle; I expect at any moment to hear that I am cashiered from the army, if not a prisoner. What is it that you ask of me now? To conspire with you in shielding the man who has done a mortal injury to the family of which I am almost one. Your reason must perceive that you ask too much. I would willingly assist you in sparing the feelings of Count Ammiani; and, believe me, gratitude is the last thing I require to stimulate my services. You ask too much; you must see that you ask too much.'

'I do,' said Vittoria. 'Good-night, Wilfrid.'

He was startled to find her going, and lost his equable voice in trying to detain her. She sought relief in Laura's bosom, to whom she recapitulated the interview.

'Is it possible,' Laura said, looking at her intently, 'that you do not recognize the folly of telling this Lieutenant Pierson that you were pleading to him on behalf of your lover? Could anything be so monstrous, when one can see that he is malleable to the twist of your little finger? Are you only half a woman, that you have no consciousness of your power? Probably you can allow yourself—enviable privilege!—to suppose that he called you down at this late hour simply to inform you that he is compelled to do something which will cause you unhappiness! I repeat, it is an enviable privilege. Now, when the real occasion has come for you to serve us, you have not a single weapon—except these tears, which you are wasting on my lap. Be sure that if he denounces Angelo, Angelo's life cries out against you. You have but to quicken your brain to save him. Did he expose his life for you or not? I knew that he was in Meran,' the signora continued sadly. 'The paper which frightened the silly peasants, revealed to me that he was there, needing help. I told you Angelo was under an evil star. I thought my day to-morrow would be a day of scheming. The task has become easy, if you will.'

'Be merciful; the task is dreadful,' said Vittoria.

'The task is simple. You have an instrument ready to your hands. You can do just what you like with him—make an Italian of him; make him renounce his engagement to this pert little Lena of Lenkenstein, break his sword, play Arlecchino, do what you please. He is not required for any outrageous performance. A week, and Angelo will have recovered his strength; you likewise may resume the statuesque demeanour which you have been exhibiting here. For the space of one week you are asked for some natural exercise of your wits and compliancy. Hitherto what have you accomplished, pray?' Laura struck spitefully at Vittoria's degraded

estimation of her worth as measured by events. 'You have done nothing—worse than nothing. It gives me horrors to find it necessary to entreat you to look your duty in the face and do it, that even three or four Italian hearts—Carlo among them—may thank you. Not Carlo, you say?' (Vittoria had sobbed, 'No, not Carlo.') 'How little you know men! How little do you think how the obligations of the hour should affect a creature deserving life! Do you fancy that Carlo wishes you to be for ever reading the line of a copy-book and shaping your conduct by it? Our Italian girls do this; he despises them. Listen to me; do not I know what is meant by the truth of love? I pass through fire, and keep constant to it; but you have some vile Romance of Chivalry in your head; a modern sculptor's figure, "MEDITATION"; that is the sort of bride you would give him in the stirring days of Italy. Do you think it is only a statue that can be true? Perceive—will you not—that this Lieutenant Pierson is your enemy. He tells you as much; surely the challenge is fair? Defeat him as you best can. Angelo shall not be abandoned.'

'O me! it is unendurable; you are merciless,' said Vittoria, shuddering.

She saw the vile figure of herself aping smirks and tender meanings to her old lover. It was a picture that she dared not let her mind rest on: how then could she personate it? All through her life she had been frank; as a young woman, she was clear of soul; she felt that her simplicity was already soiled by the bare comprehension of the abominable course indicated by Laura. Degradation seemed to have been a thing up to this moment only dreamed of; but now that it was demanded of her to play coquette and trick her womanhood with false allurements, she knew the sentiment of utter ruin; she

was ashamed. No word is more lightly spoken than shame. Vittoria's early devotion to her Art, and subsequently to her Italy, had carried her through the term when she would otherwise have showed the natural mild attack of the disease. It came on her now in a rush, penetrating every chamber of her heart, overwhelming her; she could see no distinction between being ever so little false and altogether despicable. She had loathings of her body and her life. With grovelling difficulty of speech she endeavoured to convey the sense of her repugnance to Laura, who leaned her ear, wondering at such bluntness of wit in a woman, and said, 'Are you quite deficient in the craft of your sex, child? You can, and you will, guard yourself ten times better when your aim is simply to subject him.' But this was not reason to a spirit writhing in the serpent-coil of fiery blushes.

Vittoria said, 'I shall pity him so.'

She meant she would pity Wilfrid in deluding him. It was a taint of the hypocrisy which comes with shame.

The signora retorted: 'I can't follow the action of your mind a bit.'

Pity being a form of tenderness, Laura supposed that she would intuitively hate the man who compelled her to do what she abhorred.

They spent the greater portion of the night in this debate.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ESCAPE OF ANGELO

Vittoria knew better than Laura that the task was easy; she had but to override her aversion to the show of trifling with a dead passion; and when she thought of Angelo

lying helpless in the swarm of enemies, and that Wilfrid could consent to use his tragic advantage to force her to silly love-play, his selfishness wrought its reflection, so that she became sufficiently unjust to forget her marvellous personal influence over him. Even her tenacious sentiment concerning his white uniform was clouded. She very soon ceased to be shamefaced in her own fancy. At dawn she stood at her window looking across the valley of Meran, and felt the whole scene in a song of her heart, with the faintest recollection of her having passed through a tempest overnight. The warm Southern glow of the enfoliaged valley recalled her living Italy, and Italy her voice. She grew wakefully glad: it was her nature, not her mind, that had twisted in the convulsions of last night's horror of shame. The chirp of healthy blood in full-flowing veins dispersed it; and as a tropical atmosphere is cleared by the hurricane, she lost her depression and went down among her enemies possessed by an inner delight, that was again of her nature, not of her mind. She took her gladness for a happy sign that she had power to rise buoyant above circumstances; and though aware that she was getting to see things in harsh outlines, she was unconscious of her haggard imagination.

The Lenkensteins had projected to escape the blandishments of Vienna by residing during the winter in Venice, where Wilfrid and his sister were to be the guests of the countess:—a pleasant prospect that was dashed out by an official visit from Colonel Zofel of the Meran garrison, through whom it was known that Lieutenant Pierson, while enjoying his full liberty to investigate the charms of the neighbourhood, might not extend his excursions beyond a pedestrian day's limit;—he was, in fact, under surveillance. The colonel formally exacted his word of honour that he would not attempt to pass the bounds, and explained to the duchess that the injunction was

favourable to the lieutenant, as implying that he must be ready at any moment to receive the order to join his regiment. Wilfrid bowed with a proper soldierly submission. Respecting the criminal whom his men were pursuing, Colonel Zofel said that he was sparing no efforts to come on his traces; he supposed, from what he had heard in the Ultenthal, that Guidascarpi was on his back somewhere within a short range of Meran. Vittoria strained her ears to the colonel's German; she fancied his communication to be that he suspected Angelo's presence in Meran.

The official part of his visit being terminated, the colonel addressed some questions to the duchess concerning the night of the famous Fifteenth at La Scala. He was an amateur, and spoke with enthusiasm of the reports of the new prima donna. The duchess perceived that he was asking for an introduction to the heroine of the night, and graciously said that perhaps that very prima donna would make amends to him for his absence on the occasion. Vittoria checked a movement of revolt in her frame. She cast an involuntary look at Wilfrid. 'Now it begins,' she thought, and went to the piano: she had previously refused to sing. Wilfrid had to bend his head over his betrothed and listen to her whisperings. He did so, carelessly swaying his hand to the measure of the aria, with an increasing bitter comparison of the two voices. Lena persisted in talking; she was indignant at his abandonment of the journey to Venice; she reproached him as feeble, inconsiderate, indifferent. Then for an instant she would pause to hear the voice, and renew her assault. 'We ought to be thankful that she is not singing a song of death and destruction to us! The archduchess is coming to Venice. If you are presented to her and please her, and get the writs of naturalization prepared, you will be one of us completely, and

your fortune is made. If you stay here—why should you stay? It is nothing but your uncle's caprice. I am too angry to care for music. If you stay, you will earn my contempt. I will not be buried another week in such a place. I am tired of weeping. We all go to Venice: Captain Weisspriess follows us. We are to have endless Balls, an opera, a Court there—with whom am I to dance, pray, when I am out of mourning? Am I to sit and govern my feet under a chair, and gaze like an imbecile nun? It is too preposterous. I am betrothed to you; I wish, I *wish* to behave like a betrothed. The archduchess herself will laugh to see me chained to a chair. I shall have to reply a thousand times to "Where is he?" What can I answer? "*Wouldn't* come," will be the only true reply.'

During this tirade, Vittoria was singing one of her old songs, well known to Wilfrid, which brought the vision of a foaming weir, and moonlight between the branches of a great cedar-tree, and the lost love of his heart sitting by his side in the noising stillness. He was sure that she could be singing it for no one but for him. The leap taken by his spirit from this time to that, was shorter than from the past back to the present.

'You do not applaud,' said Lena, when the song had ceased.

He murmured: 'I never do, in drawing-rooms.'

'A cantatrice expects it everywhere; these creatures live on it.'

'I 'll tell her, if you like, what *we* thought of it, when I take her down to my sister, presently.'

'Are you not to take *me* down?'

'The etiquette is to hand her up to you.'

'No, no!' Lena insisted, in abhorrence of etiquette; but Wilfrid said pointedly that his sister's feelings must be spared. 'Her husband is an animal: he is a million-

aire city-of-London merchant; conceive him! He has drunk himself gouty on Port wine, and here he is for the grape-cure.'

'Ah! in that England of yours, women marry for wealth,' said Lena.

'Yes, in your Austria they have a better motive,' he interpreted her sentiment.

'Say, in our Austria.'

'In our Austria, certainly.'

'And with our holy religion?'

'It is not yet mine.'

'It will be?' She put the question eagerly.

Wilfrid hesitated, and by his adept hesitation succeeded in throwing her off the jealous scent.

'Say that it will be, my Wilfrid!'

'You must give me time.'

'This subject always makes you cold.'

'My own Lena!'

'Can I be, if we are doomed to be parted when we die?'

There is small space for compunction in a man's heart when he is in Wilfrid's state, burning with the revival of what seemed to him a superhuman attachment. He had no design to break his acknowledged bondage to Countess Lena, and answered her tender speech almost as tenderly.

It never occurred to him, as he was walking down to Meran with Vittoria, that she could suppose him to be bartering to help rescue the life of a wretched man in return for soft confidential looks of entreaty; nor did he reflect, that when cast on him, they might mean no more than the wish to move him for a charitable purpose. The completeness of her fascination was shown by his reading her entirely by his own emotions, so that a lowly-uttered word, or a wavering unwilling glance, made him

think that she was subdued by the charm of the old days.

'Is it here?' she said, stopping under the first Italian name she saw in the arcade of shops.

'How on earth have you guessed it?' he asked, astonished.

She told him to wait at the end of the arcade, and passed in. When she joined him again, she was downcast. They went straight to Adela's hotel, where the one thing which gave her animation was the hearing that Mr. Sedley had met an English doctor there, and had placed himself in his hands. Adela dressed splendidly for her presentation to the duchess. Having done so, she noticed Vittoria's depressed countenance and difficult breathing. She commanded her to see the doctor. Vittoria consented, and made use of him. She could tell Laura confidently at night that Wilfrid would not betray Angelo, though she had not spoken one direct word to him on the subject.

Wilfrid was peculiarly adept in the idle game he played. One who is intent upon an evil end is open to expose his plan. But he had none in view; he lived for the luxurious sensation of being near the woman who fascinated him, and who was now positively abashed when by his side. Adela suggested to him faintly—she believed it was her spontaneous idea—that he might be making his countess jealous. He assured her that the fancy sprang from scenes which she remembered, and that she could have no idea of the pride of a highborn Austrian girl, who was incapable of conceiving jealousy of a person below her class. Adela replied that it was not his manner so much as Emilia's which might arouse the suspicion; but she immediately affected to appreciate the sentiments of a highborn Austrian girl toward a cantatrice, whose gifts we regard simply as an aristocratic entertainment.

Wilfrid induced his sister to relate Vittoria's early history to Countess Lena; and himself almost wondered, when he heard it in bare words, at that haunting vision of the glory of Vittoria at La Scala—where, as he remembered, he would have run against destruction to cling to her lips. Adela was at first alarmed by the concentrated wrathfulness which she discovered in the bosom of Countess Anna, who, as their intimacy waxed, spoke of the intruding opera siren in terms hardly proper even to married women; but it seemed right, as being possibly aristocratic. Lena was much more tolerant. 'I have just the same enthusiasm for soldiers that my Wilfrid has for singers,' she said; and it afforded Adela exquisite pleasure to hear her tell how that she had originally heard of the 'eccentric young Englishman,' General Pierson's nephew, as a *Lustspiel*—a comedy; and of his feats on horseback, and his duels, and his—'he *was* very wicked over here, you know'; Lena laughed. She assumed the privileges of her four-and-twenty years and her rank. Her marriage was to take place in the Spring. She announced it with the simplicity of an independent woman of the world, adding, 'That is, if my Wilfrid will oblige me by not plunging into further disgrace with the General.'

'No; you will not marry a man who is under a cloud,' Anna subjoined.

'Certainly not a soldier,' said Lena. 'What it was exactly that he did at La Scala, I don't know, and don't care to know, but he was then ignorant that she had touched the hand of that Guidascarpi. I decide by this—he was valiant; he defied everybody: therefore, *I* forgive him. He is not in disgrace with *me*. I will reinstate him.'

'You have your own way of being romantic,' said Anna. 'A soldier who forgets his duty is in my opinion only a brave fool.'

'It seems to me that a great many gallant officers are fond of fine voices,' Lena retorted.

'No doubt it is a fashion among them,' said Anna.

Adela recoiled with astonishment when she began to see the light in which the sisters regarded Vittoria; and she was loyal enough to hint and protest on her friend's behalf. The sisters called her a very good soul. 'It may not be in England as over here,' said Anna. 'We have to submit to these little social scourges.'

Lena whispered to Adela, 'An angry woman will think the worst. I have no doubt of my Wilfrid. If I had!' Her eyes flashed. Fire was not wanting in her.

The difficulties which tasked the amiable duchess to preserve an outward show of peace among the antagonistic elements she gathered together were increased by the arrival at the castle of Count Lenkenstein, Bianca's husband, and head of the family, from Bologna. He was a tall and courtly man, who had one face for his friends and another for the reverse party; which is to say, that his manners could be bad. Count Lenkenstein was accompanied by Count Serabiglione, who brought Laura's children with their Roman nurse, Assunta. Laura kissed her little ones, and sent them out of her sight. Vittoria found her home in their play and prattle. She needed a refuge, for Count Lenkenstein was singularly brutal in his bearing toward her. He let her know that he had come to Meran to superintend the hunt for the assassin, Angelo Guidascarpi. He attempted to exact her promise in precise speech that she would be on the spot to testify against Angelo when that foul villain should be caught. He objected openly to Laura's children going about with her. Bitter talk on every starting subject was exchanged across the duchess's table. She herself was in disgrace on Laura's account, and had to practise an overflowing sweetness, with no one to second her efforts.

The two noblemen spoke in accord on the bubble revolution. The strong hand—ay, the strong hand! The strong hand disposes of vermin. Laura listened to them, pallid with silent torture. 'Since the rascals have taken to assassination, we know that we have them at the dregs,' said Count Lenkenstein. 'A cord round the throats of a few scores of them, and the country will learn the virtue of docility.'

Laura whispered to her sister: 'Have you espoused a hangman?'

Such dropping of deadly shells in a quiet society went near to scattering it violently; but the union was necessitous. Count Lenkenstein desired to confront Vittoria with Angelo; Laura would not quit her side, and Amalia would not expel her friend. Count Lenkenstein complained roughly of Laura's conduct; nor did Laura escape her father's reproof. 'Sir, you are privileged to say what you will to me,' she responded, with the humility which exasperated him.

'Yes, you bend, you bend, that you may be stiff-necked when it suits you,' he snapped her short.

'Surely that is the text of the sermon you preach to our Italy!'

'A little more, as you are running on now, madame, and "our Italy" will be froth on the lips. You see, she is ruined.'

'Chi lo fa, lo sa,' hummed Laura; 'but I would avoid quoting you as that authority.'

'After your last miserable fiasco, my dear!'

'It was another of our school exercises. We had not been good boys and girls. We had learnt our lesson imperfectly. We have received our punishment, and we mean to do better next time.'

'Behave seasonably, fittingly; be less of a wasp; school your tongue.'

'Bianca is a pattern to me, I am aware,' said Laura.

'She is a good wife.'

'I am a poor widow.'

'She is a good daughter.'

'I am a wicked rebel.'

'And you are scheming at something *now*,' said the little nobleman, sagacious so far; but he was too eager to read the verification of the tentative remark in her face, and she perceived that it was a guess founded on her show of spirit.

'Scheming to contain my temper, which is much tried,' she said. 'But I suppose it supports me. I can always keep up against hostility.'

'You provoke it; you provoke it.'

'My instinct, then, divines my medicine.'

'Exactly, my dear; your personal instinct. That instigates you all. And none are so easily conciliated as these Austrians. Conciliate them, and you have them.' Count Serabiglione diverged into a repetition of his theory of the policy and mission of superior intelligences, as regarded his system for dealing with the Austrians.

Nurse Assunta's jealousy was worked upon to separate the children from Vittoria. They ran down with her no more to meet the vast bowls of grapes in the morning and feather their hats with vine leaves. Deprived of her darlings, the loneliness of her days made her look to Wilfrid for commiseration. Father Bernardus was too continually exhortative, and fenced too much to 'hit the eyeball of her conscience,' as he phrased it, to afford her repose. Wilfrid could tell himself that he had already done much for her; for if what he had done were known, his career, social and military, was ended. This idea being accompanied by a sense of security delighted him; he was accustomed to inquire of Angelo's condition, and praise the British doctor who was attending him gratui-

tously. 'I wish I could get him out of the way,' he said, and frowned as in a mental struggle. Vittoria heard him repeat his 'I wish!' It heightened greatly her conception of the sacrifice he would be making on her behalf and charity's. She spoke with a reverential tenderness, such as it was hard to suppose a woman capable of addressing to other than the man who moved her soul. The words she uttered were pure thanks; it was the tone which sent them winged and shaking seed. She had spoken partly to prompt his activity, but her self-respect had been sustained by his avoidance of the dreaded old themes, and that grateful feeling made her voice musically rich.

'I dare not go to him, but the doctor tells me the fever has left him, Wilfrid; his wounds are healing; but he is bandaged from head to foot. The sword pierced his side twice, and his arms and hands are cut horribly. He cannot yet walk. If he is discovered he is lost. Count Lenkenstein has declared that he will stay at the castle till he has him his prisoner. The soldiers are all round us. They know that Angelo is in the ring. They have traced him all over from the Valtellina to this Ultenthal, and only cannot guess where he is in the lion's jaw. I rise in the morning, thinking, "Is this to be the black day?" He is sure to be caught.'

'If I could hit on a plan,' said Wilfrid, figuring as though he had a diorama of impossible schemes revolving before his eyes.

'I could believe in the actual whispering of an angel if you did. It was to guard me that Angelo put himself in peril.'

'Then,' said Wilfrid, 'I am his debtor. I owe him as much as my life is worth.'

'Think, think,' she urged; and promised affection, devotion, veneration, vague things, that were too like

his own sentiments to prompt him pointedly. Yet he so pledged himself to her by word, and prepared his own mind to conceive the act of service, that (as he did not reflect) circumstance might at any moment plunge him into a gulf. Conduct of this sort is a challenge sure to be answered.

One morning Vittoria was gladdened by a letter from Rocco Ricci, who had fled to Turin. He told her that the king had promised to give her a warm welcome in his capital, where her name was famous. She consulted with Laura, and they resolved to go as soon as Angelo could stand on his feet. Turin was cold Italy, but it was Italy; and from Turin the Italian army was to flow, like the Mincio from the Garda lake. 'And there, too, is a stage,' Vittoria thought, in a suddenly revived thirst for the stage and a field for work. She determined to run down to Meran and see Angelo. Laura walked a little way with her, till Wilfrid, alert for these occasions, joined them. On the commencement of the zig-zag below, there were soldiers, the sight of whom was not confusing. Military messengers frequently came up to the castle where Count Lenkenstein, assisted by Count Serabiglione, examined their depositions, the Italian in the manner of a winding lawyer, the German of a gruff judge. Half way down the zig-zag Vittoria cast a preconcerted signal back to Laura. The soldiers had a pair of prisoners between their ranks; Vittoria recognized the men who had carried Captain Weisspriess from the ground where the duel was fought. A quick divination told her that they held Angelo's life on their tongues. They must have found him in the mountain-pass while hurrying to their homes, and it was they who had led him to Meran. On the Passeyr bridge, she turned and said to Wilfrid, 'Help me now. Send instantly the doctor in a carriage to the place where he is lying.'

Wilfrid was intent on her flushed beauty and the half-compressed quiver of her lip.

She quitted him and hurried to Angelo. Her joy broke out in a cry of thankfulness at sight of Angelo; he had risen from his bed; he could stand, and he smiled.

'That Jacopo is just now the nearest link to me,' he said, when she related her having seen the two men guarded by soldiers; he felt helpless, and spoke in resignation. She followed his eye about the room till it rested on the stilet. This she handed to him. 'If they think of having me alive!' he said softly. The Italian and his wife who had given him shelter and nursed him came in, and approved his going, though they did not complain of what they might chance to have incurred. He offered them his purse, and they took it. Minutes of grievous expectation went by; Vittoria could endure them no longer; she ran out to the hotel, near which, in the shade of a poplar, Wilfrid was smoking quietly. He informed her that his sister and the doctor had driven out to meet Captain Gambier; his brother-in-law was alone upstairs. Her look of amazement touched him more shrewdly than scorn, and he said, 'What on earth can I do?'

'Order out a carriage. Send your brother-in-law in it. If you tell him "for your health," he will go.'

'On my honour, I don't know where those three words would not send him,' said Wilfrid; but he did not move, and was for protesting that he really could not guess what was the matter, and the ground for all this urgency.

Vittoria compelled her angry lips to speak out her suspicions explicitly, whereupon he glanced at the sunglare in a meditation, occasionally blinking his eyes. She thought, 'Oh, heaven! can he be waiting for me to coax him?' It was the truth, though it would have been strange to him to have heard it. She grew sure that

it was the truth; never had she despised living creature so utterly as when she murmured, 'My best friend! my brother! my noble Wilfrid! my old beloved! help me now, without loss of a minute.'

It caused his breath to come and go unevenly.

'Repeat that—once, only once,' he said.

She looked at him with the sorrowful earnestness which, as its meaning was shut from him, was so sweet.

'You will repeat it by-and-by?—another time? Trust me to do my utmost. *Old* beloved! What is the meaning of "old beloved"? One word in explanation. If it means anything, I would die for you! Emilia, do you hear?—die for you! To me you are nothing old or bygone, whatever I may be to you. To me—yes, I will order the carriage—you are the Emilia—listen! listen! Ah! you have shut your ears against me. I am bound in all seeming, but I—you drive me mad; you know your power. Speak one word, that I may feel—that I may be convinced . . . or not a single word; I will obey you without. I have said that you command my life.'

In a block of carriages on the bridge, Vittoria perceived a lifted hand. It was Laura's; Beppo was in attendance on her. Laura drove up and said: 'You guessed right; where is he?' The communications between them were more indicated than spoken. Beppo had heard Jacopo confess to his having conducted a wounded Italian gentleman into Meran. 'That means that the houses will be searched within an hour,' said Laura; 'my brother-in-law Bear is radiant.' She mimicked the Lenkenstein physiognomy spontaneously in the run of her speech. 'If Angelo can help himself ever so little, he has a fair start.' A look was cast on Wilfrid; Vittoria nodded—Wilfrid was entrapped.

'Englishmen we can trust,' said Laura, and requested

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him to step into her carriage. He glanced round the open space. Beppo did the same, and beheld the chasseur Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz crossing the bridge on foot, but he said nothing. Wilfrid was on the step of the carriage, for what positive object neither he nor the others knew, when his sister and the doctor joined them. Captain Gambier was still missing.

'He would have done anything for us,' Vittoria said in Wilfrid's hearing.

'Tell us what plan you have,' the latter replied fretfully.

She whispered: 'Persuade Adela to make her husband drive out. The doctor will go too, and Beppo. They shall take Angelo. Our carriage will follow empty, and bring Mr. Sedley back.'

Wilfrid cast his eyes up in the air, at the monstrous impudence of the project. 'A storm is coming on,' he suggested, to divert her reading of his grimace; but she was speaking to the doctor, who readily answered her aloud: 'If you are certain of what you say.' The remark incited Wilfrid to be no subordinate in devotion; handing Adela from the carriage, while the doctor ran up to Mr. Sedley, he drew her away. Laura and Vittoria watched the motion of their eyes and lips.

'Will he tell her the purpose?' said Laura.

Vittoria smiled nervously: 'He is fibbing.'

Marking the energy expended by Wilfrid in this art, the wiser woman said: 'Be on your guard the next two minutes he gets you alone.'

'You see his devotion.'

'Does he see his compensation? But he must help us at any hazard.'

Adela broke away from her brother twice, and each time he fixed her to the spot more imperiously. At last she ran into the hotel; she was crying. 'A bad economy

of tears,' said Laura, commenting on the dumb scene, to soothe her savage impatience. 'In another twenty minutes we shall have the city gates locked.'

They heard a window thrown up; Mr. Sedley's head came out, and peered at the sky. Wilfrid said to Vittoria: 'I can do nothing beyond what I have done, I fear.'

She thought it was a petition for thanks, but Laura knew better; she said: 'I see Count Lenkenstein on his way to the barracks.'

Wilfrid bowed: 'I may be able to serve you in that quarter.'

He retired: whereupon Laura inquired how her friend could reasonably suppose that a man would ever endure being thanked in public.

'I shall never understand and never care to understand them,' said Vittoria.

'It is a knowledge that is forced on us, my dear. May heaven make the minds of our enemies stupid for the next five hours!—A propos of what I was saying, women and men are in two hostile camps. We have a sort of general armistice and everlasting strife of individuals—Ah!' she clapped hands on her knees, 'here comes your doctor; I could fancy I see a pointed light on his head. Men of science, my Sandra, are always the humanest.'

The chill air of wind preceding thunder was driving round the head of the vale, and Mr. Sedley, wrapped in furs, and feebly remonstrating with his medical adviser, stepped into his carriage. The doctor followed him, giving a grave recognition of Vittoria's gaze. Both gentlemen raised their hats to the ladies, who alighted as soon as they had gone in the direction of the Vintschgau road.

'One has only to furnish you with money, my Beppo,' said Vittoria, complimenting his quick apprehensiveness.

'Buy bread and cakes at one of the shops, and buy wine. You will find me where you can, when you have seen him safe. I have no idea of where my home will be. Perhaps England.'

'Italy, Italy! faint heart,' said Laura.

Furnished with money, Beppo rolled away gaily.

The doubt was in Laura whether an Englishman's wits were to be relied on in such an emergency; but she admitted that the doctor had looked full enough of serious meaning, and that the Englishman named Merthyr Powys was keen and ready. They sat a long half-hour, that thumped itself out like an alarm-bell, under the poplars, by the clamouring Passeyr, watching the roll and spring of the waters, and the radiant foam, while band-music played to a great company of visitors, and sounds of thunder drew near. Over the mountains above the Adige, the leaden fingers of an advance of the thunder-cloud pushed slowly, and on a sudden a mighty gale sat heaped black on the mountain-top and blew. Down went the heads of the poplars, the river staggered in its leap, the vale was shuddering grey. It was like the transformation in a fairy tale; Beauty had taken her old cloak about her, and bent to calamity. The poplars streamed their length sideways, and in the pauses of the strenuous wind nodded and dashed wildly and white over the dead black water, that waxed in foam and hissed, showing its teeth like a beast enraged. Laura and Vittoria joined hands and struggled for shelter. The tent of a travelling circus from the South, newly-pitched on a grass-plot near the river, was caught up and whirled in the air and flung in the face of a marching guard of soldiery, whom it swathed and bore sheer to earth, while on them and around them a line of poplars fell flat, the wind whistling over them. Laura directed Vittoria's eyes to the sight. 'See,' she said, and her face was set

hard with cold and excitement, so that she looked a witch in the uproar; 'would you not say the devil is loose now Angelo is abroad?' Thunder and lightning possessed the vale, and then a vertical rain. At the first gleam of sunlight, Laura and Vittoria walked up to the Laubengasse—the street of the arcades, where they made purchases of numerous needless articles, not daring to enter the Italian's shop. A woman at a fruit-stall opposite to it told them that no carriage could have driven up there. During their great perplexity, mud and rain-stained soldiers, the same whom they had seen borne to earth by the flying curtain, marched before the shop; the shop and the house were searched; the Italian and his old limping wife were carried away.

'Tell me now, that storm was not Angelo's friend!' Laura muttered.

'Can he have escaped?' said Vittoria.

'He is "on horseback."' Laura quoted the Italian proverb to signify that he had flown; how, she could not say, and none could inform her. The joy of their hearts rose in one fountain.

'I shall feel better blood in my body from this moment,' Laura said; and Vittoria, 'Oh! we can be strong, if we only resolve.'

'You want to sing?'

'I do.'

'I shall find pleasure in your voice now.'

'The wicked voice!'

'Yes, the very wicked voice! But I shall be glad to hear it. You can sing to-night, and drown those Lenkensteins.'

'If my Carlo could hear me!'

'Ah!' sighed the signora, musing. '*He* is in prison now. I remember him, the dearest little lad, fencing with my husband for exercise after they had been writing

all day. When Giacomo was imprisoned, Carlo sat outside the prison walls till it was time for him to enter; his chin and upper lip were as smooth as a girl's. Giacomo said to him, "May you always have the power of going out, or not have a wife waiting for you." Here they come.' (She spoke of tears.) 'It 's because I am joyful. The channel for them has grown so dry that they prick and sting. Oh, Sandra! it would be pleasant to me if we might both be buried for seven days, and have one long howl of weakness together. A little bite of satisfaction makes me so tired. I believe there 's something very bad for us in our always being at war, and never, never gaining ground. Just one spark of triumph intoxicates us. Look at all those people pouring out again. They are the children of fair weather. I hope the state of their health does not trouble them too much. Vienna sends consumptive patients here. If you regard them attentively, you will observe that they have an anxious air. Their constitutions are not sound; they fear they may die.'

Laura's irony was unforced; it was no more than a subtle discord naturally struck from the scene by a soul in contrast with it.

They beheld the riding forth of troopers and a knot of officers hotly conversing together. At another point the duchess and the Lenkenstein ladies, Count Lenkenstein, Count Serabiglione, and Wilfrid paced up and down, waiting for music. Laura left the public places and crossed an upper bridge over the Passeyr, near the castle, by which route she skirted vines and dropped over sloping meadows to some shaded boulders where the Passeyr found a sandy bay, and leaped in transparent green, and whitened and swung twisting in a long smooth body down a narrow chasm, and noised below. The thundering torrent stilled their sensations: and the water,

making battle against great blocks of porphyry and granite, caught their thoughts. So strong was the impression of it on Vittoria's mind, that for hours after, every image she conceived seemed proper to the inrush and outpour; the elbowing, the tossing, the foaming, the burst on stones, and silvery bubbles under and silvery canopy above, the chattering and huzzaing; all working on to the one-toned fall beneath the rainbow on the castle-rock.

Next day, the chasseur Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz deposed in full company at Sonnenberg, that, obeying Count Serabiglione's instructions, he had gone down to the city, and had there seen Lieutenant Pierson with the ladies in front of the hotel; he had followed the English carriage, which took up a man who was standing ready on crutches at the corner of the Laubengasse, and drove rapidly out of the North-western gate, leading to Schlanders and Mals and the Engadine. He had witnessed the transfer of the crippled man from one carriage to another, and had raised shouts and given hue and cry, but the intervention of the storm had stopped his pursuit.

He was proceeding to say what his suppositions were. Count Lenkenstein lifted his finger for Wilfrid to follow him out of the room. Count Serabiglione went at their heels. Then Count Lenkenstein sent for his wife, whom Anna and Lena accompanied.

'How many persons are you going to ruin in the course of your crusade, my dear?' the duchess said to Laura.

'Dearest, I am penitent when I succeed,' said Laura.

'If that young man has been assisting you, he is irretrievably ruined.'

'I am truly sorry for him.'

'As for me, the lectures I shall get in Vienna are terrible

to think of. This is the consequence of being the friend of both parties, and a peace-maker.'

Count Serabiglione returned alone from the scene at the examination, rubbing his hands and nodding affably to his daughter. He maliciously declined to gratify the monster of feminine curiosity in the lump, and doled out the scene piecemeal. He might state, he observed, that it was he who had lured Beppo to listen at the door during the examination of the prisoners; and who had then planted a spy on him—following the dictation of precepts exceedingly old. 'We are generally beaten, duchess; I admit it; and yet we generally contrive to show the brains. As I say, wed brains to brute force!—but my Laura prefers to bring about a contest instead of an union, so that somebody is certain to be struck, and'—the count spread out his arms and bowed his head—'deserves the blow.' He informed them that Count Lenkenstein had ordered Lieutenant Pierson down to Meran, and that the lieutenant might expect to be cashiered within five days. 'What does it matter?' he addressed Vittoria. 'It is but a shuffling of victims; Lieutenant Pierson in the place of Guidascarpi! I do not object.'

Count Lenkenstein withdrew his wife and sisters from Sonnenberg instantly. He sent an angry message of adieu to the duchess, informing her that he alone was responsible for the behaviour of the ladies of his family. The poor duchess wept. 'This means that I shall be summoned to Vienna for a scolding, and have to meet my husband,' she said to Laura, who permitted herself to be fondled, and barely veiled her exultation in her apology for the mischief she had done. An hour after the departure of the Lenkensteins, the castle was again officially visited by Colonel Zofel. Vittoria and Laura received an order to quit the district of Meran before

sunset. The two firebrands dropped no tears. 'I really *am* sorry for others when I succeed,' said Laura, trying to look sad upon her friend.

'No; the heart is eaten out of you both by excitement,' said the duchess.

Her tender parting, 'Love me,' in the ear of Vittoria, melted one heart of the two.

Count Serabiglione continued to be buoyed up by his own and his daughter's recent display of a superior intellectual dexterity until the carriage was at the door and Laura presented her cheek to him. He said, 'You will know me a wise man when I am off the table.' His gesticulations expressed 'Ruin, headlong ruin!' He asked her how she could expect him to be for ever repairing her follies. He was going to Vienna; how could he dare to mention her name there? Not even in a trifle would she consent to be subordinate to authority. Laura checked her replies—the surrendering of a noble Italian life to the Austrians was such a trifle! She begged only that a poor wanderer might depart with a father's blessing. The count refused to give it; he waved her off in a fury of reproof; and so got smoothly over the fatal moment when money, or the promise of money, is commonly extracted from parental sources, as Laura explained his odd behaviour to her companion. The carriage-door being closed, he regained his courtly composure; his fury was displaced by a chiding finger, which he presently kissed. Father Bernardus was on the steps beside the duchess, and his blessing had not been withheld from Vittoria, though he half confessed to her that she was a mystery in his mind, and would always be one.

'He can understand robust hostility,' Laura said, when Vittoria recalled the look of his benevolent forehead and drooping eyelids; 'but robust ductility does astonish him. He has not meddled with me; yet I am the one

of the two who would be fair prey for an enterprising spiritual father, as the destined man of heaven will find out some day.'

She bent and smote her lap. 'How little they know us, my darling! They take fever for strength, and calmness for submission. Here is the world before us, and I feel that such a man, were he to pounce on me now, might snap me up and lock me in a praying-box with small difficulty. And I am the inveterate rebel! What is it nourishes you and keeps you always aiming straight when you are alone? Once in Turin, I shall feel that I am myself. Out of Italy I have a terrible craving for peace. It seems here as if I must lean down to him, my beloved, who has left me.'

Vittoria was in alarm lest Wilfrid should accost her while she drove from gate to gate of the city. They passed under the archway of the gate leading up to Schloss Tyrol, and along the road bordered by vines. An old peasant woman stopped them with the signal of a letter in her hand. 'Here it is,' said Laura, and Vittoria could not help smiling at her shrewd anticipation of it.

'*May I follow?*'

Nothing more than that was written.

But the bearer of the missive had been provided with a lead pencil to obtain the immediate reply.

'An admirable piece of foresight!' Laura's honest exclamation burst forth.

Vittoria had to look in Laura's face before she could gather her will to do the cruel thing which was least cruel. She wrote firmly:—

'*Never follow me.*'

CHAPTER XXIX

EPISODES OF THE REVOLT AND THE WAR

THE TOBACCO-RIOTS—RINALDO GUIDASCARPI

Anna von Lenkenstein was one who could wait for vengeance. Lena punished on the spot, and punished herself most. She broke off her engagement with Wilfrid, while at the same time she caused a secret message to be conveyed to him, telling him that the prolongation of his residence in Meran would restore him to his position in the army.

Wilfrid remained at Meran till the last days of December.

It was winter in Milan, turning to the new year—the year of flames for continental Europe. A young man with a military stride, but out of uniform, had stepped from a travelling carriage, and entered a cigar-shop. Upon calling for cigars, he was surprised to observe the woman who was serving there keep her arms under her apron. She cast a look into the street, where a crowd of boys and one or two lean men had gathered about the door. After some delay, she entreated her customer to let her pluck his cloak halfway over the counter; at the same time she thrust a cigar-box under that concealment, together with a printed song in the Milanese dialect. He lifted the paper to read it, and found it tough as Russ. She translated some of the more salient couplets. Tobacco had become a dead business, she said, now that the popular edict had gone forth against 'smoking gold into the pockets of the Tedeschi.' None smoked except officers and Englishmen.

'I am an Englishman,' he said.

'And not an officer?' she asked; but he gave no answer. 'Englishmen are rare in winter, and don't like being mobbed,' said the woman.

Nodding to her urgent petition, he deferred the lighting of his cigar. The vetturino requested him to jump up quickly, and a howl of 'No smoking in Milan—fuori! —down with tobacco-smokers!' beset the carriage. He tossed half-a-dozen cigars on the pavement derisively. They were scrambled for, as when a pack of wolves are diverted by a garment dropped from the flying sledge, but the unluckier hands came after his heels in fuller howl. He noticed the singular appearance of the streets. Bands of the scum of the population hung at various points: from time to time a shout was raised at a distance, 'Abbasso il sigaro!' and 'Away with the cigar!' went an organized file-firing of cries along the open place. Several gentlemen were mobbed, and compelled to fling the cigars from their teeth. He saw the polizia in twos and threes taking counsel and shrugging, evidently too anxious to avoid a collision. Austrian soldiers and subalterns alone smoked freely; they puffed the harder when the yells and hootings and whistlings thickened at their heels. Sometimes they walked on at their own pace; or, when the noise swelled to a crisis, turned and stood fast, making an exhibition of curling smoke, as a mute form of contempt. Then commenced hustlings and a tremendous uproar; sabres were drawn, the white-coats planted themselves back to back. Milan was clearly in a condition of rageing disease. The soldiery not only accepted the challenge of the mob, but assumed the offensive. Here and there they were seen crossing the street to puff obnoxiously in the faces of people. Numerous subalterns were abroad, lively for strife, and bright with the signal of their readiness. An icy wind

blew down from the Alps, whitening the housetops and the ways, but every street, corso, and piazza was dense with loungers, as on a summer evening; the clamour of a skirmish anywhere attracted streams of disciplined rioters on all sides; it was the holiday of rascals.

Our traveller had ordered his vetturino to drive slowly to his hotel, that he might take the features of this novel scene. He soon showed his view of the case by putting an unlighted cigar in his mouth. The vetturino noted that his conveyance acted as a kindling-match to awaken cries in quiet quarters, looked round, and grinned savagely at the sight of the cigar.

'Drop it, or I drop you,' he said; and hearing the command to drive on, pulled up short.

They were in a narrow way leading to the Piazza de' Mercanti. While the altercation was going on between them, a great push of men emerged from one of the close courts some dozen paces ahead of the horse, bearing forth a single young officer in their midst.

'Signore, would you like to be the froth of a boiling of that sort?' The vetturino seized the image at once to strike home his instance of the danger of outraging the will of the people.

Our traveller immediately unlocked a case that lay on the seat in front of him, and drew out a steel scabbard, from which he plucked the sword, and straightway leaped to the ground. The officer's cigar had been dashed from his mouth: he stood at bay, sword in hand, meeting a rush with a desperate stroke. The assistance of a second sword got him clear of the fray. Both hastened forward as the crush melted with the hiss of a withdrawing wave. They interchanged exclamations:—

'Is it you, Jenna?'

'In the devil's name, Pierson, have you come to keep your appointment in mid-winter?'

'Come on: I 'll stick beside you.'

'On, then!'

They glanced behind them, heeding little the tail of ruffians whom they had silenced.

'We shall have plenty of fighting soon, so we 'll smoke a cordial cigar together,' said Lieutenant Jenna, and at once struck a light and blazed defiance to Milan afresh—an example that was necessarily followed by his comrade. 'What has happened to you, Pierson? Of course, I knew you were ready for our bit of play—though you 'll hear what I said of you. How the deuce could you think of running off with that opera girl, and getting a fellow in the mountains to stab our merry old Weisspriess, just because you fancied he was going to slip a word or so over the back of his hand in Countess Lena's ear? No wonder she 's shy of you now.'

'So, that 's the tale afloat,' said Wilfrid. 'Come to my hotel and dine with me. I suppose that cur has driven my luggage there.'

Jenna informed him that officers had to muster in barracks every evening.

'Come and see your old comrades; they 'll like you better in bad luck—there 's the comfort of it: hang the human nature! She 's a good old brute, if you don't drive her hard. Our regiment left Verona in November. There we had tolerable cookery; come and take the best we can give you.'

But this invitation Wilfrid had to decline.

'Why?' said Jenna.

He replied: 'I 've stuck at Meran three months. I did it in obedience to what I understood from Colonel Zofel to be the General's orders. When I was as perfectly dry as a baked Egyptian, I determined to believe that I was not only in disgrace, but dismissed the service. I posted to Botzen and Riva, on to

Milan; and here I am. The least I can do is to show myself here.'

'Very well, then, come and show yourself at our table,' said Jenna. 'Listen: we 'll make a furious row after supper, and get hauled in by the collar before the General. You can swear you have never been absent from duty: swear the General never gave you forcible furlough. I 'll swear it; all our fellows will swear it. The General will say, "Oh! a very big lie 's equal to a truth; big brother to a fact," or something; as he always does, you know. Face it out. We can't spare a good stout sword in these times. On with me, my Pierson.'

'I would,' said Wilfrid, doubtfully.

A douse of water from a window extinguished their cigars.

Lieutenant Jenna wiped his face deliberately, and lighting another cigar, remarked—'This is the fifth poor devil who has come to an untimely end within an hour. It is brisk work. Now, I 'll swear I 'll smoke *this* one out.'

The cigar was scattered in sparks from his lips by a hat skilfully flung. He picked it up miry and cleaned it, observing that his honour was pledged to this fellow. The hat he trampled into a muddy lump. Wilfrid found it impossible to ape his coolness. He swung about for an adversary. Jenna pulled him on.

'A salute from a window,' he said. 'We can't storm the houses. The time 'll come for it—and then, you cats!'

Wilfrid inquired how long this state of things had been going on. Jenna replied that they appeared to be in the middle of it;—nearly a week. Another week, and their day would arrive; and then!

'Have you heard anything of a Count Ammiani here?' said Wilfrid.

'Oh! he 's one of the lot, I believe. We have him

fast, as we 'll have the bundle of them. Keep eye on those dogs behind us, and manœuvre your cigar. The plan is, to give half-a-dozen bright puffs, and then keep it in your fist; and when you see an Italian head, volcano him like fury. Yes, I 've heard of that Ammiani. The scoundrels made an attempt to get him out of prison—I fancy he 's in the city prison—last Friday night. I don't know exactly where he is; but it 's pretty fair reckoning to say that he 'll enjoy a large slice of the next year in the charming solitude of Spielberg, if Milan is restless. Is he a friend of yours?'

'Not by any means,' said Wilfrid.

'La mia prigione!' Jenna mouthed with ineffable contemptuousness; 'he 'll have time to write his memoirs, as one of the dogs did. I remember my mother crying over the book. *I* read it? Not I! I never read books. My father said—the stout old colonel—"Prison seems to make these Italians take an interest in themselves." "Oh!" says my mother, "why can't they be at peace with us?" "That 's exactly the question," says my father, "we 're always putting to them." And so I say. Why can't they let us smoke our cigars in peace?'

Jenna finished by assaulting a herd of faces with smoke.

'Pig of a German!' was shouted; and 'Porco, porco,' was sung in a scale of voices. Jenna received a blinding slap across the eyes. He staggered back; Wilfrid slashed his sword in defence of him. He struck a man down. 'Blood! blood!' cried the gathering mob, and gave space, but hedged the couple thickly. Windows were thrown up; forth came a rain of household projectiles. The cry of 'Blood! blood!' was repeated by numbers pouring on them from the issues to right and left. It is a terrible cry in a city. In a city of the South it rouses the wild beast in men to madness.

Jenna smoked triumphantly and blew great clouds, with an eye aloft for the stools, basins, chairs, and water descending. They were in the middle of one of the close streets of old Milan. The man felled by Wilfrid was raised on strong arms, that his bleeding head might be seen of all, and a dreadful hum went round. A fire of missiles, stones, balls of wax, lumps of dirt, sticks of broken chairs, began to play. Wilfrid had a sudden gleam of the face of his Verona assailant. He and Jenna called 'Follow me,' in one breath, and drove forward with sword-points, which they dashed at the foremost; by dint of swift semi-circlings of the edges they got through, but a mighty voice of command thundered; the rearward portion of the mob swung rapidly to the front, presenting a scattered second barrier; Jenna tripped on a fallen body, lost his cigar, and swore that he must find it. A dagger struck his sword-arm. He staggered and flourished his blade in the air, calling 'On!' without stirring. 'This infernal cigar!' he said; and to the mob, 'What mongrel of you took my cigar?' Stones thumped on his breast; the barrier-line ahead grew denser. 'I 'll go at them first; you 're bleeding,' said Wilfrid. They were refreshed by the sound of German cheering, as in approach. Jenna uplifted a crow of the regimental hurrah of the charge; it was answered; on they went and got through the second fence, saw their comrades, and were running to meet them, when a weighted ball hit Wilfrid on the back of the head. He fell, as he believed, on a cushion of down, and saw thousands of saints dancing with lamps along cathedral aisles.

The next time he opened his eyes he fancied he had dropped into the vaults of the cathedral. His sensation of sinking was so vivid that he feared lest he should be going still further below. There was a lamp in the

chamber, and a young man sat reading by the light of the lamp. Vision danced fantastically on Wilfrid's brain. He saw that he rocked as in a ship, yet there was no noise of the sea; nothing save the remote thunder haunting empty ears at strain for sound. He looked again; the young man was gone, the lamp was flickering. Then he became conscious of a strong ray on his eyelids; he beheld his enemy gazing down on him and swooned. It was with joy, that when his wits returned, he found himself looking on the young man by the lamp. 'That other face was a dream,' he thought, and studied the aspect of the young man with the unwearied attentiveness of partial stupor, that can note accurately, but cannot deduce from its noting, and is inveterate in patience because it is unideaed. Memory wakened first.

'Guidascarpi!' he said to himself.

The name was uttered half aloud. The young man started and closed his book.

'You know me?' he asked.

'You are Guidascarpi?'

'I am.'

'Guidascarpi, I think I helped to save your life in Meran.'

The young man stooped over him. 'You speak of my brother Angelo. I am Rinaldo. My debt to you is the same, if you have served him.'

'Is he safe?'

'He is in Lugano.'

'The Signorina Vittoria?'

'In Turin.'

'Where am I?'

The reply came from another mouth than Rinaldo's.

'You are in the poor lodging of the shoemaker, whose shoes, if you had thought fit to wear them, would have conducted you anywhere but to this place.'

'Who are you?' Wilfrid moaned.

'You ask who I am. I am the Eye of Italy. I am the Cat who sees in the dark.' Barto Rizzo raised the lamp and stood at his feet. 'Look straight. You know me, I think.'

Wilfrid sighed, 'Yes, I know you; do your worst.'

His head throbbed with the hearing of a heavy laugh, as if a hammer had knocked it. What ensued he knew not; he was left to his rest. He lay there many days and nights, that were marked by no change of light; the lamp burned unwearyingly. Rinaldo and a woman tended him. The sign of his reviving strength was shown by a complaint he launched at the earthy smell of the place.

'It is like death,' said Rinaldo, coming to his side. 'I am used to it, and familiar with death too,' he added in a musical undertone.

'Are you also a prisoner here?' Wilfrid questioned him.

'I am.'

'The brute does not kill, then?'

'No; he saves. I owe my life to him. He has rescued yours.'

'Mine?' said Wilfrid.

'You would have been torn to pieces in the streets but for Barto Rizzo.'

The streets were the world above to Wilfrid; he was eager to hear of the doings in them. Rinaldo told him that the tobacco-war raged still; the soldiery had recently received orders to smoke abroad, and street battles were hourly occurring. 'They call this government!' he interjected.

He was a soft-voiced youth; slim and tall and dark, like Angelo, but with a more studious forehead. The book he was constantly reading was a book of chemistry.

He entertained Wilfrid with very strange talk. He spoke of the stars and of a destiny. He cited certain minor events of his life to show the ground of his present belief in there being a written destiny for each individual man. 'Angelo and I know it well. It was revealed to us when we were boys. It has been certified to us up to this moment. Mark what I tell you,' he pursued in a devout sincerity of manner that baffled remonstrance, '*my* days end with this new year. His end with the year following. Our house is dead.'

Wilfrid pressed his hand. 'Have you not been too long underground?'

'That is the conviction I am coming to. But when I go out to breathe the air of heaven, I go to my fate. Should I hesitate? We Italians of this period are children of thunder and live the life of a flash. The worms may creep on: the men must die. Out of us springs a better world. Romara, Ammiani, Mercadesco, Montesini, Rufo, Cardi, whether they see it or not, will sweep forward to it. To some of them, one additional day of breath is precious. Not so for Angelo and me. We are unbeloved. We have neither mother nor sister, nor betrothed. What is an existence that can fly to no human arms? I have been too long underground, because, while I continue to hide, I am as a drawn sword between two lovers.'

The previous mention of Ammiani's name, together with the knowledge he had of Ammiani's relationship to the Guidascarpi, pointed an instant identification of these lovers to Wilfrid.

He asked feverishly who they were, and looked his best simplicity, as one who was always interested by stories of lovers.

The voice of Barto Rizzo, singing 'Vittoria!' stopped Rinaldo's reply: but Wilfrid read it in his smile at that

word. He was too weak to restrain his anguish, and flung on the couch and sobbed. Rinaldo supposed that he was in fear of Barto, and encouraged him to meet the man confidently. A lusty 'Viva l'Italia! Vittoria!' heralded Barto's entrance. 'My boy! my noblest! we have beaten them—the cravens! Tell me now—have I served an apprenticeship to the devil for nothing? We have struck the cigars out of their mouths and the monopoly-money out of their pockets. They have surrendered. The Imperial order prohibits soldiers from smoking in the streets of Milan, and so throughout Lombardy! Soon we will have the prisons empty, by our own order. Trouble yourself no more about Ammiani. He shall come out to the sound of trumpets. I hear them! Hither, my Rosellina, my plump melon; up with your red lips, and buss me a Napoleon salute—ha! ha!'

Barto's wife went into his huge arm, and submissively lifted her face. He kissed her like a barbaric king, laughing as from wine.

Wilfrid smothered his head from his incarnate thunder. He was unnoticed by Barto. Presently a silence told him that he was left to himself. An idea possessed him that the triumph of the Italians meant the release of Ammiani, and his release the loss of Vittoria for ever. Since her graceless return of his devotion to her in Meran, something like a passion—arising from the sole spring by which he could be excited to conceive a passion—had filled his heart. He was one of those who delight to dally with gentleness and faith, as with things that are their heritage; but the mere suspicion of coquettry and indifference plunged him into a fury of jealous wrathfulness, and tossed so desireable an image of beauty before him that his mad thirst to embrace it seemed love. By our manner of loving we are known. He thought it no

meanness to escape and cause a warning to be conveyed to the Government that there was another attempt brewing for the rescue of Count Ammiani. Acting forthwith on the hot impulse, he seized the lamp. The door was unlocked. Luckier than Luigi had been, he found a ladder outside, and a square opening through which he crawled; continuing to ascend along close passages and up narrow flights of stairs, that appeared to him to be fashioned to avoid the rooms of the house. At last he pushed a door, and found himself in an armoury, among stands of muskets, swords, bayonets, cartouche-boxes, and, most singular of all, though he observed them last, small brass pieces of cannon, shining with polish. Shot was piled in pyramids beneath their mouths. He examined the guns admiringly. There were rows of daggers along shelves; some in sheath, others bare; one that had been hastily wiped showed a smear of ropy blood. He stood debating whether he should seize a sword for his protection. In the act of trying its temper on the floor, the sword-hilt was knocked from his hand, and he felt a coil of arms around him. He was in the imprisoning embrace of Barto Rizzo's wife. His first, and perhaps natural, impression accused her of a violent display of an eccentric passion for his manly charms; and the tighter she locked him, the more reasonably was he held to suppose it; but as, while stamping on the floor, she offered nothing to his eyes save the yellow poll of her neck, and hung neither panting nor speaking, he became undeceived. His struggles were preposterous; his lively sense of ridicule speedily stopped them. He remained passive, from time to time desperately adjuring his living prison to let him loose, or to conduct him whither he had come; but the inexorable coil kept fast—how long there was no guessing—till he could have roared out tears of rage, and that is extremity for an Englishman.

Rinaldo arrived in his aid; but the woman still clung to him. He was freed only by the voice of Barto Rizzo, who marched him back. Rinaldo subsequently told him that his discovery of the armoury necessitated his confinement.

'Necessitates it!' cried Wilfrid. 'Is this your Italian gratitude?'

The other answered: 'My friend, you risked your fortune for my brother; but this is a case that concerns our country.'

He deemed these words to be an unquestionable justification, for he said no more. After this they ceased to converse. Each lay down on his strip of couch-matting; rose and ate, and passed the dreadful untimed hours; nor would Wilfrid ask whether it was day or night. We belong to time so utterly, that when we get no note of time, it wears the shrouded head of death for us already. Rinaldo could quit the place as he pleased; he knew the hours; and Wilfrid supposed that it must be hatred that kept him from voluntarily divulging that blessed piece of knowledge. He had to encourage a retorting spirit of hatred in order to mask his intense craving. By an assiduous calculation of seconds and minutes, he was enabled to judge that the lamp burned a space of six hours before it required replenishing. Barto Rizzo's wife trimmed it regularly, but the accursed woman came at all seasons. She brought their meals irregularly, and she would never open her lips: she was like a guardian of the tombs. Wilfrid abandoned his dream of the variation of night and day, and with that the sense of life deadened, as the lamp did toward the sixth hour. Thenceforward his existence fed on the movements of his companion, the workings of whose mind he began to read with a marvellous insight. He knew once, long in advance of the act or an indication of it, that Rinaldo

was bent on prayer. Rinaldo had slightly closed his eyelids during the perusal of his book; he had taken a pencil and traced lines on it from memory, and dotted points here and there; he had left the room, and returned to resume his study. Then, after closing the book softly, he had taken up the mark he was accustomed to place in the last page of his reading, and tossed it away. Wilfrid was prepared to clap hands when he should see the hated fellow drop on his knees; but when that sight verified his calculation, he huddled himself exultingly in his couch-cloth:—it was like a confirming clamour to him that he was yet wholly alive. He watched the anguish of the prayer, and was rewarded for the strain of his faculties by sleep. Barto Rizzo's rough voice awakened him. Barto had evidently just communicated dismal tidings to Rinaldo, who left the vault with him, and was absent long enough to make Wilfrid forget his hatred in an irresistible desire to catch him by the arm and look in his face.

'Ah! you have not forsaken me,' the greeting leaped out.

'Not now,' said Rinaldo.

'Do you think of going?'

'I will speak to you presently, my friend.'

'Hound!' cried Wilfrid, and turned his face to the wall.

Until he slept, he heard the rapid travelling of a pen; on his awakening, the pen vexed him like a chirping cricket that tells us that cock-crow is long distant when we are moaning for the dawn. Great drops of sweat were on Rinaldo's forehead. He wrote as one who poured forth a history without pause. Barto's wife came to the lamp and beckoned him out, bearing the lamp away. There was now for the first time darkness in this vault. Wilfrid called Rinaldo by name, and heard nothing but the fear of the place, which seemed to rise bristling at his

voice and shrink from it. He called till dread of his voice held him dumb. 'I am, then, a coward,' he thought. Nor could he by-and-by repress a start of terror on hearing Rinaldo speak out of the darkness. With screams for the lamp, and cries that he was suffering slow murder, he underwent a paroxysm in the effort to conceal his abject horror. Rinaldo sat by his side patiently. At last, he said: 'We are both of us prisoners on equal terms now.' That was quieting intelligence to Wilfrid, who asked eagerly: 'What hour is it?'

It was eleven of the forenoon. Wilfrid strove to dissociate his recollection of clear daylight from the pressure of the hideous featureless time surrounding him. He asked: 'What week?' It was the first week in March. Wilfrid could not keep from sobbing aloud. In the early period of such a captivity, imagination, deprived of all other food, conjures phantasms for the employment of the brain; but there is still some consciousness within the torpid intellect wakeful to laugh at them as they fly, though they have held us at their mercy. The face of time had been imaged like the withering mask of a corpse to him. He had felt, nevertheless, that things had gone on as we trust them to do at the closing of our eyelids: he had preserved a mystical remote faith in the steady running of the world above, and hugged it as his most precious treasure. A thunder was rolled in his ears when he heard of the flight of two months at one bound. Two big months! He would have guessed, at farthest, two weeks. 'I have been two months in one shirt? Impossible!' he exclaimed. His serious idea (he cherished it for the support of his reason) was, that the world above had played a mad prank since he had been shuffled off its stage.

'It can't be March,' he said. 'Is there sunlight overhead?'

'It is a true Milanese March,' Rinaldo replied.

'Why am I kept a prisoner?'

'I cannot say. There must be some idea of making use of you.'

'Have you arms?'

'I have none.'

'You know where they 're to be had.'

'I know, but I would not take them if I could. They, my friend, are for a better cause.'

'A thousand curses on your country!' cried Wilfrid. 'Give me air; give me freedom; I am stifled; I am eaten up with dirt; I am half dead. Are we never to have the lamp again?'

'Hear me speak,' Rinaldo stopped his ravings. 'I will tell you what my position is. A second attempt has been made to help Count Ammiani's escape; it has failed. He is detained a prisoner by the Government under the pretence that he is implicated in the slaying of an Austrian noble by the hands of two brothers, one of whom slew him justly—not as a dog is slain, but according to every honourable stipulation of the code. I was the witness of the deed. It is for me that my cousin, Count Ammiani, droops in prison when he should be with his bride. Let me speak on, I pray you. I have said that I stand between two lovers. I can release him, I know well, by giving myself up to the Government. Unless I do so instantly, he will be removed from Milan to one of their fortresses in the interior, and there he may cry to the walls and iron-bars for his trial. They are aware that he is dear to Milan, and these two miserable attempts have furnished them with their excuse. Barto Rizzo bids me wait. I have waited: I can wait no longer. The lamp is withheld from me to stop my writing to my brother, that I may warn him of my design, but the letter is written; the messenger is on his way to Lugano.

I do not state my intentions before I have taken measures to accomplish them. I am as much Barto Rizzo's prisoner now as you are.'

The plauge of darkness and thirst for daylight prevented Wilfrid from having any other sentiment than gladness that a companion equally unfortunate with himself was here, and equally desirous to go forth. When Barto's wife brought their meal, and the lamp to light them eating it, Rinaldo handed her pen, ink, pencil, paper, all the material of correspondence; upon which, as one who had received a stipulated exchange, she let the lamp remain. While the new and thrice-dear rays were illumining her dark-coloured solid beauty, I know not what touch of man-like envy or hurt vanity led Wilfrid to observe that the woman's eyes dwelt with a singular fulness and softness on Rinaldo. It was fulness and softness void of fire, a true ox-eyed gaze, but human in the fall of the eyelids; almost such as an early poet of the brush gave to the Virgin carrying her Child, to become an everlasting reduplicated image of a mother's strong beneficence of love. He called Rinaldo's attention to it when the woman had gone. Rinaldo understood his meaning at once.

'It will have to be so, I fear,' he said; 'I have thought of it. But if I lead her to disobey Barto, there is little hope for the poor soul.' He rose up straight, like one who would utter grace for meat. 'Must we, O my God, give a sacrifice at every step?'

With that he resumed his seat stiffly, and bent and murmured to himself. Wilfrid had at one time of his life imagined that he was marked by a peculiar distinction from the common herd; but contact with this young man taught him to feel his fellowship to the world at large, and to rejoice at it, though it partially humbled him.

They had no further visit from Barto Rizzo. The woman tended them in the same unswerving silence, and at whiles that adorable maternity of aspect. Wilfrid was touched by commiseration for her. He was too bitterly fretful on account of clean linen and the liberty which fluttered the prospect of it, to think much upon what her fate might be: perhaps a beating, perhaps the knife. But the vileness of wearing one shirt two months and more had hardened his heart; and though he was considerate enough not to prompt his companion very impatiently, he submitted desperate futile schemes to him, and suggested — 'To-night? — to-morrow? — the next day?' Rinaldo did not heed him. He lay on his couch like one who bleeds inwardly, thinking of the complacent faithfulness of that poor creature's face. Barto Rizzo had sworn to him that there should be a rising in Milan before the month was out; but he had lost all confidence in Milanese risings. Ammiani would be removed, if he delayed; and he knew that the moment his letter reached Lugano, Angelo would start for Milan and claim to surrender in his stead. The woman came, and went forth, and Rinaldo did not look at her until his resolve was firm.

He said to Wilfrid in her presence, 'Swear that you will reveal nothing of this house.'

Wilfrid spiritedly pronounced his gladdest oath.

'It is dark in the streets,' Rinaldo addressed the woman. 'Lead us out, for the hour has come when I must go.'

She clutched her hands below her bosom to stop its great heaving, and stood as one smitten by the sudden hearing of her sentence. The sight was pitiful, for her face scarcely changed; the anguish was expressionless. Rinaldo pointed sternly to the door.

'Stay,' Wilfrid interposed. 'That wretch may be in the house, and will kill her.'

'She is not thinking of herself,' said Rinaldo.

'But, stay,' Wilfrid repeated. The woman's way of taking breath shocked and enfeebled him.

Rinaldo threw the door open.

'Must you? must you?' her voice broke.

'Waste no words.'

'You have not seen a priest.'

'I go to him.'

'You die.'

'What is death to me? Be dumb, that I may think well of you till my last moment.'

'What is death to me? Be dumb!'

She had spoken with her eyes fixed on his couch. It was the figure of one upon the scaffold, knitting her frame to hold up a strangled heart.

'What is death to me? Be dumb!' she echoed him many times on the rise and fall of her breathing, and turned to get him in her eyes. 'Be dumb! be dumb!' She threw her arms wide out, and pressed his temples and kissed him.

The scene was like hot iron to Wilfrid's senses. When he heard her coolly asking him for his handkerchief to blind him, he had forgotten the purpose, and gave it mechanically. Nothing was uttered throughout the long mountings and descent of stairs. They passed across one corridor where the walls told of a humming assemblage of men within. A current of keen air was the first salute Wilfrid received from the world above; his handkerchief was loosened; he stood foolish as a blind man, weak as a hospital patient, on the steps leading into a small square of visible darkness, and heard the door shut behind him. Rinaldo led him from the court to the street.

'Farewell,' he said. 'Get some housing instantly; avoid exposure to the air. I leave you.'

Wilfrid spent his tongue in a fruitless and meaningless remonstrance. 'And you?' he had the grace to ask.

'I go straight to find a priest. Farewell.'

So they parted.

CHAPTER XXX

EPISODES OF THE REVOLT AND THE WAR

THE FIVE DAYS OF MILAN

The same hand which brought Rinaldo's letter to his brother delivered a message from Barto Rizzo, bidding Angelo to start at once and head a stout dozen or so of gallant Swiss. The letter and the message appeared to be grievous contradictions: one was evidently a note of despair, while the other sang like a trumpet. But both were of a character to draw him swiftly on to Milan. He sent word to his Lugano friends, naming a village among the mountains between Como and Varese, that they might join him there if they pleased.

Toward nightfall, on the nineteenth of the month, he stood with a small band of Ticinese and Italian fighting lads two miles distant from the city. There was a momentary break in long hours of rain; the air was full of inexplicable sounds, that floated over them like a toning of multitudes wailing and singing fitfully behind a swaying screen. They bent their heads. At intervals a sovereign stamp on the pulsation of the uproar said, distinct as a voice in the ear—Cannon. 'Milan's alive!' Angelo cried, and they streamed forward under the hurry of stars and scud, till thumping guns and pattering

musket-shots, the long big boom of surgent hosts, and the muffled voluming and crash of storm-bells, proclaimed that the insurrection was hot. A rout of peasants bearing immense ladders met them, and they joined with cheers, and rushed to the walls. As yet no gate was in the possession of the people. The walls showed bayonet-points: a thin edge of steel encircled a pit of fire. Angelo resolved to break through at once. The peasants hesitated, but his own men were of one mind to follow, and, planting his ladder in the ditch, he rushed up foremost. The ladder was full short; he called out in German to a soldier to reach his hand down, and the butt-end of a musket was dropped, which he grasped, and by this aid sprang to the parapet, and was seized. 'Stop,' he said, 'there 's a fellow below with my brandy-flask and portmanteau.' The soldiers were Italians; they laughed, and hauled away at man after man of the mounting troop, calling alternately 'brandy-flask!—portmanteau!' as each one raised a head above the parapet. 'The signor has a good supply of spirits and baggage,' they remarked. He gave them money for porterage, saying, 'You see, the gates are held by that infernal people, and a quiet traveller must come over the walls. Viva l'Italia! who follows me?' He carried away three of those present. The remainder swore that they and their comrades would be on his side on the morrow. Guided by the new accession to his force, Angelo gained the streets. All shots had ceased; the streets were lighted with torches and hand-lamps; barricades were up everywhere, like a convulsion of the earth. Tired of receiving challenges and mounting the endless piles of stones, he sat down at the head of the Corso di Porta Nuova, and took refreshments from the hands of ladies. The house-doors were all open. The ladies came forth bearing wine and minestra, meat and

bread, on trays; and quiet eating and drinking, and fortifying of the barricades, went on. Men were rubbing their arms and trying rusty gun-locks. Few of them had not seen Barto Rizzo that day; but Angelo could get no tidings of his brother. He slept on a door-step, dreaming that he was blown about among the angels of heaven and hell by a glorious tempest. Near morning an officer of volunteers came to inspect the barricade defences. Angelo knew him by sight; it was Luciano Romara. He explained the position of the opposing forces. The Marshal, he said, was clearly no street-fighter. Estimating the army under his orders in Milan at from ten to eleven thousand men of all arms, it was impossible for him to guard the gates and the walls, and at the same time fight the city. Nor could he provision his troops. Yesterday the troops had made one charge and done mischief, but they had immediately retired. 'And if they take to cannonading us to-day, we shall know what that means,' Romara concluded. Angelo wanted to join him. 'No, stay here,' said Romara. 'I think you are a man who won't give ground.' He had not seen either Rinaldo or Ammiani, but spoke of both as certain to be rescued.

Rain and cannon filled the weary space of that day. Some of the barricades fronting the city gates had been battered down by nightfall; they were restored within an hour. Their defenders entered the houses right and left during the cannonade, waiting to meet the charge; but the Austrians held off. 'They have no plan,' Romara said on his second visit of inspection; 'they are waiting on Fortune, and starve meanwhile. We can beat them at that business.'

Romara took Angelo and his Swiss away with him. The interior of the city was abandoned by the Imperialists, who held two or three of the principal buildings

and the square of the Duomo. Clouds were driving thick across the cold-gleaming sky when the storm-bells burst out with the wild Jubilee-music of insurrection—a carol, a jangle of all discord, savage as flame. Every church of the city lent its iron tongue to the peal; and now they joined and now rolled apart, now joined again and clanged like souls shrieking across the black gulfs of an earthquake; they swam aloft with mournful delirium, tumbled together, were scattered in spray, dissolved, renewed, died, as a last worn wave casts itself on an unfooted shore, and rang again as through rent doorways, became a clamorous host, an iron body, a pressure as of a down-drawn firmament, and once more a hollow vast, as if the abysses of the Circles were sounded through and through. To the Milanese it was an intoxication; it was the howling of madness to the Austrians—a torment and a terror: they could neither sing, nor laugh, nor talk under it. Where they stood in the city, the troops could barely hear their officers' call of command. No sooner had the bells broken out than the length of every street and Corso flashed with the tricoloured flag; musket-muzzles peeped from the windows; men with great squares of pavement lined the roofs. Romara mounted a stiff barricade and beheld a scattered regiment running the gauntlet of storms of shot and missiles, in full retreat upon the citadel. On they came, officers in front for the charge, as usual with the Austrians; fire on both flanks, a furious mob at their heels, and the barricade before them. They rushed at Romara, and were hurled back, and stood in a riddled lump. Suddenly Romara knocked up the rifles of the couching Swiss; he yelled to the houses to stop firing. 'Surrender your prisoners,—you shall pass,' he called. He had seen one dear head in the knot of the soldiery. No answer was given. Romara, with Angelo and his Swiss and the

ranks of the barricade, poured over and pierced the streaming mass, steel for steel.

'Ammiani! Ammiani!' Romara cried; a roar from the other side, 'Barto! Barto! the Great Cat!' met the cry. The Austrians struck up a cheer under the iron derision of the bells; it was ludicrous; it was as if a door had slammed on their mouths, ringing tremendous echoes in a vaulted roof. They stood sweeping fire in two oblong lines; a show of military array was preserved like a tattered robe, till Romara drove at their centre and left the retreat clear across the barricade. Then the whitecoats were seen flowing over, the motley surging hosts from the city in pursuit—foam of a storm-torrent hurled forward by the black tumult of precipitous waters. Angelo fell on his brother's neck; Romara clasped Carlo Ammiani. These two were being marched from the prison to the citadel when Barto Rizzo, who had prepared to storm the building, assailed the troops. To him mainly they were indebted for their rescue.

Even in that ecstasy of meeting, the young men smiled at the preternatural transport on his features as he bounded by them, mad for slaughter, and mounting a small brass gun on the barricade, sent the charges of shot into the rear of the enemy. He kissed the black lip of his little thunderer in a rapture of passion; called it his wife, his naked wife; the best of mistresses, who spoke only when he charged her to speak; raved that she was fair, and liked hugging; that she was true, and the handsomest daughter of Italy; that she would be the mother of big ones—none better than herself, though they were mountains of sulphur big enough to make one gulp of an army.

His wife in the flesh stood at his feet with a hand-grenade and a rifle, daggers and pistols in her belt. Her face was black with powder-smoke as the muzzle of the

gun. She looked at Rinaldo once, and Rinaldo at her; both dropped their eyes, for their joy at seeing one another alive was mighty.

Dead Austrians were gathered in a heap. Dead and wounded Milanese were taken into the houses. Wine was brought forth by ladies and household women. An old crutched beggar, who had performed a deed of singular intrepidity in himself kindling a fire at the door of one of the principal buildings besieged by the people, and who showed perforated rags with a comical ejaculation of thanks to the Austrians for knowing how to hit a scarecrow and make a beggar holy, was the object of particular attention. Barto seated him on his gun, saying that his mistress and beauty was honoured; ladies were proud in waiting on the fine frowzy old man. It chanced during that morning that Wilfrid Pierson had attached himself to Lieutenant Jenna's regiment as a volunteer. He had no arms, nothing but a huge white umbrella, under which he walked dry in the heavy rain, and passed through the fire like an impassive spectator of queer events. Angelo's Swiss had captured them, and the mob were maltreating them because they declined to shout for this valorous ancient beggarman. 'No doubt he 's a capital fellow,' said Jenna; 'but "*Viva Scottocorni*" is not my language'; and the spirited little subaltern repeated his 'Excuse me,' with very good temper, while one knocked off his shako, another tugged at his coat-skirts. Wilfrid sang out to the Guidascarpi, and the brothers sprang to him and set them free; but the mob, like any other wild beast gorged with blood, wanted play, and urged Barto to insist that these victims should shout the viva in exaltation of their hero.

'Is there a finer voice than mine?' said Barto, and he roared the 'viva' like a melodious bull. Yet Wilfrid saw that he had been recognized. In the hour of triumph

Barto Rizzo had no lust for petty vengeance. The magnanimous devil plumped his gorge contentedly on victory. His ardour blazed from his swarthy crimson features like a blown fire, when scouts came running down with word that all about the Porta Camosina, Madonna del Carmine, and the Gardens, the Austrians were reaping the white flag of the inhabitants of that district. Thitherward his cry of 'Down with the Tedeschi!' led the boiling tide. Rinaldo drew Wilfrid and Jenna to an open doorway, counselling the latter to strip the gold from his coat and speak his Italian in monosyllables. A woman of the house gave her promise to shelter and to pass them forward. Romara, Ammiani, and the Guidascarpi, went straight to the Casa Gonfalonieri, where they hoped to see stray members of the Council of War, and hear a correction of certain unpleasant rumours concerning the dealings of the Provisional Government with Charles Albert.

The first crack of a division between the patriot force and the aristocracy commenced this day; the day following it was a breach.

A little before dusk the bells of the city ceased their hammering, and when they ceased, all noises of men and musketry seemed childish. The woman who had promised to lead Wilfrid and Jenna to the citadel, feared no longer either for herself or them, and passed them on up the Corso Francesco past the Contrada del Monte. Jenna pointed out the Duchess of Graätli's house, saying, 'By the way, the Lenkensteins are here; they left Venice last week. Of course you know, or don't you?—and there they must stop, I suppose.' Wilfrid nodded an immediate good-bye to him, and crossed to the house-door. His eccentric fashion of acting had given him fame in the army, but Jenna stormed at it now, and begged him to come on and present himself to General

Schöneck, if not to General Pierson. Wilfrid refused even to look behind him. In fact, it was a part of the gallant fellow's coxcombry (or nationality) to play the Englishman. He remained fixed by the house-door till midnight, when a body of men in the garb of citizens, volubly and violently Italian in their talk, struck thrice at the door. Wilfrid perceived Count Lenkenstein among them. The ladies Bianca, Anna, and Lena, issued mantled and hooded between the lights of two barricade watchfires. Wilfrid stepped after them. They had the pass-word, for the barricades were crossed. The captain of the head-barricade in the Corso demurred, requiring a counter-sign. Straightway he was cut down. He blew an alarm-call, when up sprang a hundred torches. The band of Germans dashed at the barricade as at the tusks of a boar. They were picked men, most of them officers, but a scanty number in the thick of an armed populace. Wilfrid saw the lighted passage into the great house, and thither, throwing out his arms, he bore the affrighted group of ladies, as a careful shepherd might do. Returning to Count Lenkenstein's side, 'Where are they?' the count said, in mortal dread. 'Safe,' Wilfrid replied. The count frowned at him inquisitively. 'Cut your way through, and on!' he cried to three or four who hung near him; and these went to the slaughter.

'Why do you stand by me, sir?' said the count. Interior barricades were pouring their combatants to the spot; Count Lenkenstein was plunged upon the door-steps. Wilfrid gained half-a-minute's parley by shouting in his foreign accent, 'Would you hurt an Englishman?' Some one took him by the arm, and helping to raise the count, hurried them both into the house.

'You must make excuses for popular fury in times like these,' the stranger observed.

The Austrian nobleman asked him stiffly for his name.

The name of Count Ammiani was given. 'I think you know it,' Carlo added.

'You escaped from your lawful imprisonment this day, did you not?—you and your cousin, the assassin. I talk of law! I might as justly talk of honour. Who lives here?' Carlo contained himself to answer, 'The present occupant is, I believe, if I have hit the house I was seeking, the Countess d'Isorella.'

'My family were placed here, sir?' Count Lenkenstein inquired of Wilfrid. But Wilfrid's attention was frozen by the sight of Vittoria's lover. A wifely call of 'Adalbert' from above quieted the count's anxiety.

'Countess d'Isorella,' he said. 'I know that woman. She belongs to the secret cabinet of Carlo Alberto—a woman with three edges. Did she not visit you in prison two weeks ago? I speak to you, Count Ammiani. She applied to the Archduke and the Marshal for permission to visit you. It was accorded. To the devil with our days of benignity! She was from Turin. The shuffle has made her my hostess for the nonce. I will go to her. You, sir,' the count turned to Wilfrid—'you will stay below. Are you in the pay of the insurgents?'

Wilfrid, the weakest of human beings where women were involved with him, did one of the hardest things which can task a young man's fortitude: he looked his superior in the face, and neither blenched, nor frowned, nor spoke.

Ammiani spoke for him. 'There is no pay given in our ranks.'

'The licence to rob is supposed to be an equivalent,' said the count.

Countess d'Isorella herself came downstairs, with profuse apologies for the absence of all her male domestics, and many delicate dimples about her mouth in uttering them. Her look at Ammiani struck Wilfrid as having a

peculiar burden either of meaning or of passion in it. The count grimaced angrily when he heard that his sister Lena was not yet able to bear the fatigue of a walk to the citadel. 'I fear you must all be my guests, for an hour at least,' said the countess.

Wilfrid was left pacing the hall. He thought he had never beheld so splendid a person, or one so subjugatingly gracious. Her speech and manner poured oil on the uncivil Austrian nobleman. What perchance had stricken Lena? He guessed; and guessed it rightly. A folded scrap of paper signed by the Countess of Lenkenstein was brought to him.

It said:—'Are you making common cause with the rebels? Reply. One asks who should be told.'

He wrote:—'I am an outcast of the army. I fight as a volunteer with the K. K. troops. Could I abandon them in their peril?'

The touch of sentiment he appended for Lena's comfort. He was too strongly impressed by the new vision of beauty in the house for his imagination to be flushed by the romantic posture of his devotion to a trailing flag.

No other message was delivered. Ammiani presently descended and obtained a guard from the barricade; word was sent on to the barricades in advance toward the citadel. Wilfrid stood aside as Count Lenkenstein led the ladies to the door, bearing Lena on his arm. She passed her lover veiled. The count said, 'You follow.' He used the menial second person plural of German, and repeated it peremptorily.

'I follow no civilian,' said Wilfrid.

'Remember, sir, that if you are seen with arms in your hands, and are not in the ranks, you run the chances of being hanged.'

Lena broke loose from her brother; in spite of Anna's sharp remonstrance and the count's vexed stamp of the

foot, she implored her lover:—'Come with us; pardon us; protect me—me! You shall not be treated harshly. They shall not—— Oh! be near me. I have been ill; I shrink from danger. Be near me!'

Such humble pleading permitted Wilfrid's sore spirit to succumb with the requisite show of chivalrous dignity. He bowed, and gravely opened his enormous umbrella, which he held up over the heads of the ladies, while Ammiani led the way. All was quiet near the citadel. A fog of plashing rain hung in red gloom about the many watch-fires of the insurgents, but the Austrian head-quarters lay sombre and still. Close at the gates, Ammiani saluted the ladies. Wilfrid did the same, and heard Lena's call to him unmoved.

'May I dare to hint to you that it would be better for you to join your party?' said Ammiani.

Wilfrid walked on. After appearing to weigh the matter, he answered, 'The umbrella will be of no further service to them to-night.'

Ammiani laughed, and begged to be forgiven; but he could have done nothing more flattering.

Sore at all points, tricked and ruined, irascible under the sense of his injuries, hating everybody and not honouring himself, Wilfrid was fast growing to be an eccentric by profession. To appear cool and careless was the great effort of his mind.

'We were introduced one day in the Piazza d'Armi,' said Ammiani. 'I would have found means to convey my apologies to you for my behaviour on that occasion, but I have been at the mercy of my enemies. Lieutenant Pierson, will you pardon me? I have learnt how dear you and your family should be to me. Pray, accept my excuses and my counsel. The Countess Lena was my friend when I was a boy. She is in deep distress.'

'I thank you, Count Ammiani, for your extremely

disinterested advice,' said Wilfrid; but the Italian was not cut to the quick by his irony; and he added; 'I have hoisted, you perceive, the white umbrella instead of wearing the white coat. It is almost as good as an hotel in these times; it gives as much shelter and nearly as much provision, and, I may say, better attendance. Good-night. You will be at it again about daylight, I suppose?'

'Possibly a little before,' said Ammiani, cooled by the false ring of this kind of speech.

'It 's useless to expect that your infernal bells will not burst out like all the lunatics on earth?'

'Quite useless, I fear. Good-night.'

Ammiani charged one of the men at an outer barricade to follow the white umbrella and pass it on.

He returned to the Countess d'Isorella, who was awaiting him, and alone.

This glorious head had aroused his first boyish passion. Scandal was busy concerning the two, when Violetta d'Asola, the youthfullest widow in Lombardy and the loveliest woman, gave her hand to Count d'Isorella, who took it without question of the boy Ammiani. Carlo's mother assisted in that arrangement; a maternal plot, for which he could thank her only after he had seen Vittoria, and then had heard the buzz of whispers at Violetta's name. Countess d'Isorella proved her friendship to have survived the old passion, by travelling expressly from Turin to obtain leave to visit him in prison. It was a marvellous face to look upon between prison walls. Rescued while the soldiers were marching him to the citadel that day, he was called by pure duty to pay his respects to the countess as soon as he had heard from his mother that she was in the city. Nor was his mother sorry that he should go. She had patiently submitted to the fact of his betrothal to Vittoria, which was his

safeguard in similar perils; and she rather hoped for Violetta to wean him from his extreme republicanism. By arguments? By influence, perhaps. Carlo's republicanism was preternatural in her sight, and she presumed that Violetta would talk to him discreetly and persuasively of the noble designs of the king.

Violetta d'Isorella received him with a gracious lifting of her fingers to his lips; congratulating him on his escape, and on the good fortune of the day. She laughed at the Lenkensteins and the singular Englishman; sat down to a little supper-tray, and pouted humorously as she asked him to feed on confects and wine; the huge appetites of the insurgents had devoured all her meat and bread.

'Why are you here?' he said.

She did well in replying boldly, 'For the king.'

'Would you tell another that it is for the king?'

'Would I speak to another as I speak to you?'

Ammiani inclined his head.

They spoke of the prospects of the insurrection, of the expected outbreak in Venice, the eruption of Paris and Vienna, and the new life of Italy; touching on Carlo Alberto to explode the truce in a laughing dissension. At last she said seriously, 'I am a born Venetian, you know; I am not Piedmontese. Let me be sure that the king betrays the country, and I will prefer many heads to one. Excuse me if I am more womanly just at present. The king has sent his accredited messenger Tartini to the Provisional Government, requesting it to accept his authority. Why not? why not? on both sides. Count Medole gives his adhesion to the king, but you have a Council of War that rejects the king's overtures—a revolt within a revolt. It is deplorable. You *must* have an army. The Piedmontese once over the Ticino, how can you act in opposition to it? You *must* learn

to take a master. The king is only, or he appears, tricksy because you compel him to wind and counterplot. I swear to you, Italy is his foremost thought. The Star of Italy sits on the Cross of Savoy.'

Ammiani kept his eyelids modestly down. 'Ten thousand to plead for him, such as you!' he said. 'But there is only one!'

'If you had been headstrong once upon a time, and I had been weak, you see, my Carlo, you would have been a domestic tyrant, I a rebel. You will not admit the existence of a virtue in an opposite opinion. Wise was your mother when she said "No" to a wilful boy!'

Violetta lit her cigarette and puffed the smoke lightly.

'I told you in that horrid dungeon, my Carlo Amaranto —I call you by the old name—the old name is sweet!—I told you that your Vittoria is enamoured of the king. She blushes like a battle-flag for the king. I have heard her "Viva il Re!" It was musical.'

'So I should have thought.'

'Ay, but my amaranto-innamorato, does it not foretell strife? Would you ever—ever take a heart with a king's head stamped on it into your arms?'

'Give me the chance!'

He was guilty of this ardent piece of innocence though Violetta had pitched her voice in the key significant of a secret thing belonging to two memories that had not always flowed dividedly.

'Like a common coin?' she resumed.

'*A heart with a king's head stamped on it like a common coin.*'

He recollected the sentence. He had once, during the heat of his grief for Giacomo Piaveni, cast it in her teeth.

Violetta repeated it, as to herself, tonelessly; a method of making an old unkindness strike back on its author with effect.

'Did we part good friends? I forget,' she broke the silence.

'We meet, and we will be the best of friends,' said Ammiani.

'Tell your mother I am not three years older than her son,—I am thirty. Who will make me young again? Tell her, my Carlo, that the genius for intrigue, of which she accuses me, develops at a surprising rate. As regards my beauty——' the countess put a tooth of pearl on her soft underlip.

Ammiani assured her that he would find words of his own for her beauty.

'I hear the eulogy, I know the sonnet,' said Violetta, smiling, and described the points of a brunette: the thick black banded hair, the full brown eyes, the plastic brows couching over them;—it was Vittoria's face. Violetta was a flower of colour, fair, with but one shade of dark tinting on her brown eye-brows and eye-lashes, as you may see a strip of night-cloud cross the forehead of morning. She was yellow-haired, almost purple-eyed, so rich was the blue of the pupils. Vittoria could be sallow in despondency; but this Violetta never failed in plumpness and freshness. The pencil which had given her aspect the one touch of discord, endowed it with a subtle harmony, like mystery; and Ammiani remembered his having stood once on the Lido of Venice, and eyed the dawn across the Adriatic, and dreamed that Violetta was born of the loveliness and held in her bosom the hopes of morning. He dreamed of it now, feeling the smooth roll of a torrent.

A cry of 'Arms!' rang down the length of the Corso.

He started to his feet thankfully.

'Take me to your mother,' she said. 'I loathe to hear firing and be alone.'

Ammiani threw up the window. There was a stir of

lamps and torches below, and the low sky hung red. Violetta stood quickly thick-shod and hooded.

'Your mother will admit my companionship, Carlo?'

'She desires to thank you.'

'She has no longer any fear of me?'

'You will find her of one mind with you.'

'Concerning the king!'

'I would say, on most subjects.'

'But that you do not know my mind! You are modest. Confess that you are thinking the hour you have passed with me has been wasted.'

'I am, now I hear the call to arms.'

'If I had all the while entertained you with talk of your Vittoria! It would not have been wasted then, my amaranto. It is not wasted for me. If a shot should strike you——'

'Tell her I died loving her with all my soul!' cried Ammiani.

Violetta's frame quivered as if he had smitten her.

They left the house. Countess Ammiani's door was the length of a barricade distant: it swung open to them, like all the other house-doors which were, or wished to be esteemed, true to the cause, and hospitable toward patriots.

'Remember, when you need a refuge, my villa is on Lago Maggiore,' Violetta said, and kissed her finger-tips to him.

An hour after, by the light of this unlucky little speech, he thought of her as a shameless coquette. '*When* I need a refuge? Is not Milan in arms?—Italy alive? She considers it all a passing epidemic; or, perhaps, she is to plead for me to the king!'

That set him thinking moodily over the things she had uttered of Vittoria's strange and sudden devotion to the king.

Rainy dawn and the tongues of the churches ushered in the last day of street fighting. Ammiani found Romara and Colonel Corte at the head of strong bodies of volunteers, well-armed, ready to march for the Porta Tosa. All three went straight to the house where the Provisional Government sat, and sword in hand denounced Count Medole as a traitor who sold his country to the king. Corte dragged him to the window to hear the shouts for the Republic. Medole wrote their names down one by one, and said, 'Shall I leave the date vacant?' They put themselves at the head of their men, and marched in the ringing of the bells. The bells were their sacro-military music. Barto Rizzo was off to make a spring at the Porta Ticinese. Students, peasants, noble youths of the best blood, old men and young women, stood ranged in the drenching rain, eager to face death for freedom. At mid-day the bells were answered by cannon and the blunt snap of musketry volleys; dull, savage responses, as of a wounded great beast giving short howls and snarls by the interminable over-roaring of a cataract. Messengers from the gates came running to the quiet centre of the city, where cool men discoursed and plotted. Great news, big lies, were shouted:—Carlo Alberto thundered in the plains; the Austrians were everywhere retiring; the Marshal was a prisoner; the flag of surrender was on the citadel! These things were for the ears of thirsty women, diplomatists, and cripples.

Countess Ammiani and Countess d'Isorella sat together throughout the agitation of the day.

The life prayed for by one seemed a wisp of straw flung on this humming furnace.

Countess Ammiani was too well used to defeat to believe readily in victory, and had shrouded her head in resignation too long to hope for what she craved. Her

hands were joined softly in her lap. Her visage had the same unmoved expression when she conversed with Violetta as when she listened to the ravings of the Corso.

Darkness came, and the bells ceased not rolling by her open windows: the clouds were like mists of conflagration.

She would not have the windows closed. The noise of the city had become familiar and akin to the image of her boy. She sat there cloaked.

Her heart went like a timepiece to the two interrogations to heaven: 'Alive?—or dead?'

The voice of Luciano Romara was that of an angel's answering. He entered the room neat and trim as a cavalier dressed for social evening duty, saying with his fine tact, 'We are all well'; and after talking like a gazette of the Porta Tosa taken by the volunteers, Barto Rizzo's occupation of the gate opening on the Ticino, and the bursting of the Porta Camosina by the freebands of the plains, he handed a letter to Countess Ammiani.

'Carlo is on the march to Bergamo and Brescia, with Corte, Sana, and about fifty of our men,' he said.

'And is wounded—where?' asked Violetta.

'Slightly in the hand—you see, he can march,' Romara said, laughing at her promptness to suspect a subterfuge, until he thought, 'Now, what does this mean, madam?'

A lamp was brought to Countess Ammiani. She read:—

'My Mother!

'Cotton-wool on the left fore-finger. They deigned to give me no other memorial of my first fight. I am not worthy of papa's two bullets. I march with Corte and Sana to Brescia. We keep the passes of the Tyrol. Luciano heads five hundred up to the hills to-morrow

or next day. He must have all our money. Then go from door to door and beg subscriptions. Yes, my Chief! it is to be like God, and deserving of his gifts to lay down all pride, all wealth. This night send to my betrothed in Turin. She must be with no one but my mother. It is my command. Tell her so. I hold imperatively to it.

'I breathe the best air of life. Luciano is a fine leader in action, calm as in a ball-room. What did I feel? I will talk of it with you by-and-by;—my father whispered in my ears; I felt him at my right hand. He said, "I died for this day." I feel now that I must have seen him. This is imagination. We may say that anything is imagination. I certainly heard his voice. Be of good heart, my mother, for I can swear that the General wakes up when I strike Austrian steel. He loved Brescia; so I go there. God preserve my mother! The eyes of heaven are wide enough to see us both. Vittoria by your side, remember! It is my will.

'Carlo.'

Countess Ammiani closed her eyes over the letter, as in a dead sleep. 'He is more his father than himself, and so suddenly!' she said. She was tearless. Violetta helped her to her bed-room under the pretext of a desire to hear the contents of the letter.

That night, which ended the five days of battle in Milan, while fires were rageing at many gates, bells were rolling over the roof-tops, the army of Austria coiled along the North-eastern walls of the city, through rain and thick obscurity, and wove its way like a vast worm into the outer land.

CHAPTER XXXI

EPISODES OF THE REVOLT AND THE WAR

VITTORIA DISOBEYS HER LOVER

Countess d'Isorella's peculiar mission to Milan was over with the victory of the city. She undertook personally to deliver Carlo's injunction to Vittoria on her way to the king. Countess Ammiani deemed it sufficient that her son's wishes should be repeated verbally; and as there appeared to be no better messenger than one who was bound for Turin and knew Vittoria's place of residence, she entrusted the duty to Violetta.

The much which hangs on little was then set in motion.

Violetta was crossing the Ticino when she met a Milanese nobleman who had received cold greeting from the king, and was returning to Milan with word that the Piedmontese declaration of war against Austria had been signed. She went back to Milan, saw and heard, and gathered a burden for the royal ears. This was a woman, tender only to the recollection of past days, who used her beauty and her arts as weapons for influence. She liked kings because she saw neither master nor dupe in a republic; she liked her early lover because she could see nothing but a victim in any new one. She was fond of Carlo, as greatly occupied minds may be attached to an old garden where they have aforetime sown fair seed. Jealousy of a rival in love that was disconnected with political business and her large expenditure, had never yet disturbed the lady's nerves.

At Turin she found Vittoria singing at the opera, and winning marked applause from the royal box. She

thought sincerely that to tear a prima donna from her glory would be very much like dismissing a successful General to his home and gabbling family. A most eminent personage agreed with her. Vittoria was carelessly informed that Count Ammiani had gone to Brescia, and having regard for her safety, desired her to go to Milan to be under the protection of his mother, and that Countess Ammiani was willing to receive her.

Now, with her mother, and her maid Giacinta, and Beppo gathered about her, for three weeks Vittoria had been in full operatic career, working, winning fame, believing that she was winning influence, and establishing a treasury. The presence of her lover in Milan would have called her to the noble city; but he being at Brescia, she asked herself why she should abstain from labours which contributed materially to the strength of the revolution and made her helpful. It was doubtful whether Countess Ammiani would permit her to sing at La Scala; or whether the city could support an opera in the throes of war. And Vittoria was sending money to Milan. The stipend paid to her by the impresario, the jewels, the big bouquets—all flowed into the treasury of the insurrection. Antonio-Pericles advanced her a large sum on the day when the news of the Milanese uprising reached Turin: the conditions of the loan had simply been that she should continue her engagement to sing in Turin. He was perfectly slavish to her, and might be trusted to advance more. Since the great night at La Scala, she had been often depressed by a secret feeling that there was divorce between her love of her country and devotion to her Art. Now that both passions were in union, both active, each aiding the fire of the other, she lived a consummate life. She could not have abandoned her path instantly though Carlo had spoken his command to her in person. Such were her first

spontaneous reasonings, and Laura Piaveni seconded them; saying, 'Money, money! we must be Jews for money. We women are not allowed to fight, but we can manage to contribute our *lire* and *soldi*; we can forge the sinews of war.'

Vittoria wrote respectfully to Countess Ammiani stating why she declined to leave Turin. The letter was poorly worded. While writing it she had been taken by a sentiment of guilt and of isolation in presuming to disobey her lover. 'I am glad he will not see it,' she remarked to Laura, who looked rapidly across the lines, and said nothing. Praise of the king was in the last sentence. Laura's eyes lingered on it half-a-minute.

'Has he not drawn his sword? He is going to march,' said Vittoria.

'Oh, yes,' Laura replied coolly; 'but you put that to please Countess Ammiani.'

Vittoria confessed she had not written it purposely to defend the king. 'What harm?' she asked.

'None. Only this playing with shades allows men to call us hypocrites.'

The observation angered Vittoria. She had seen the king of late; she had breathed Turin incense and its atmosphere; much that could be pleaded on the king's behalf she had listened to with the sympathetic pity which can be a woman's best judgement, and is the sentiment of reason. She had also brooded over the king's character, and had thought that if the Chief could have her opportunities for studying this little impressible, yet strangely impulsive royal nature, his severe condemnation of him would be tempered. In fact, she was doing what makes a woman excessively tender and opinionated; she was petting her idea of the misunderstood one: she was thinking that she divined the king's character by mystical intuition; I will dare to say,

maternally apprehended it. And it was a character strangely open to feminine perceptions, while to masculine comprehension it remained a dead blank, done either in black or in white.

Vittoria insisted on praising the king to Laura.

'With all my heart,' Laura said, 'so long as he is true to Italy.'

'How, then, am I hypocritical?'

'My Sandra, you are certainly perverse. You admitted that you did something for the sake of pleasing Countess Ammiani.'

'I did. But to be hypocritical one must be false.'

'Oh!' went Laura.

'And I write to Carlo. He does not care for the king; therefore it is needless for me to name the king to him; and I shall not.'

Laura said, 'Very well.' She saw a little deeper than the perversity, though she did not see the springs. In Vittoria's letter to her lover, she made no allusion to the Sword of Italy.

Countess Ammiani forwarded both letters on to Brescia.

When Carlo had finished reading them, he heard all Brescia clamouring indignantly at the king for having disarmed volunteers on Lago Maggiore and elsewhere in his dominions. Milan was sending word by every post of the overbearing arrogance of the Piedmontese officers and officials, who claimed a prostrate submission from a city fresh with the ardour of the glory it had won for itself, and that would fain have welcomed them as brothers. Romara and others wrote of downright visible betrayal. It was a time of passions:—great readiness for generosity, equal promptitude for undiscriminating hatred. Carlo read Vittoria's praise of the king with insufferable anguish. 'You—you part of me, can write

like this!' he struck the paper vehemently. The fury of action transformed the gentle youth. Countess Ammiani would not have forwarded the letter addressed to herself had she dreamed the mischief it might do. Carlo saw double-dealing in the absence of any mention of the king in his own letter.

'Quit Turin at once,' he dashed hasty lines to Vittoria; 'and no "Viva il Re" till we know what he may merit. Old delusions are pardonable; but you must now look abroad with your eyes. Your words should be the echoes of my soul. Your acts are mine. For the sake of the country, do nothing to fill me with shame. The king is a traitor. I remember things said of him by Agostino; I subscribe to them every one. Were you like any other Italian girl, you might cry for him—who would care! But you are Vittoria. Fly to my mother's arms, and there rest. The king betrays us. Is a stronger word necessary? I am writing too harshly to you;—and here are the lines of your beloved letter throbbing round me while I write; but till the last shot is fired I try to be iron, and would hold your hand and not kiss it—not be mad to fall between your arms—not wish for you—not think of you as a woman, as my beloved, as my Vittoria; I hope and pray not, if I thought there was an ace of work left to do for the country. Or if one could say that you cherished a shred of loyalty for him who betrays it. Great heaven! am I to imagine that royal flatteries—— My hand is not my own! You shall see all that it writes. I will seem to you no better than I am. I do not tell you to be a Republican, but an Italian. If I had room for myself in my prayers—oh! one half-instant to look on you, though with chains on my limbs. The sky and the solid ground break up when I think of you. I fancy I am still in prison. Angelo was music to me for two whole days (without a morning to the first and a night

to the second). He will be here to-morrow and talk of you again. I long for him more than for battle—almost long for you more than for victory for our Italy.

'This is Brescia, which my father said he loved better than his wife.

'General Paolo Ammiani is buried here. I was at his tombstone this morning. I wish you had known him.

'You remember, we talked of his fencing with me daily. "*I love the fathers who do that.*" You said it. He will love you. Death is the shadow—not life. I went to his tomb. It was more to think of Brescia than of him. Ashes are only ashes; tombs are poor places. My soul is the power.

'If I saw the Monte Viso this morning, I saw right over your head when you were sleeping.

'Farewell to journalism—I hope, for ever. I jump at shaking off the journalistic phrascology Agostino laughs at. Yet I was right in printing my "young nonsense." I did hold the truth, and that was felt, though my vehicle for delivering it was rubbish.

'In two days Corte promises to sing his song, "Avanti." I am at his left hand. Venice, the passes of the Adige, the Adda, the Oglio are ours. The room is locked; we have only to exterminate the reptiles inside it. Romara, D'Arci, Carnischi march to hold the doors. Corte will push lower; and if I can get him to enter the plains and join the main army I shall rejoice.'

The letter concluded with a postscript that half an Italian regiment, with white coats swinging on their bayonet-points, had just come in.

It reached Vittoria at a critical moment.

Two days previously, she and Laura Piaveni had talked with the king. It was an unexpected honour. Countess d'Isorella conducted them to the palace. The lean-headed sovereign sat booted and spurred, his sword across

his knees; he spoke with a peculiar sad hopefulness of the prospects of the campaign, making it clear that he was risking more than any one risked, for his stake was a crown. The few words he uttered of Italy had a golden ring in them; Vittoria knew not why they had it. He condemned the Republican spirit of Milan more regretfully than severely. The Republicans were, he said, impracticable. Beyond the desire for change, they knew not what they wanted. He did not state that he should avoid Milan in his march. On the contrary, he seemed to indicate that he was about to present himself to the people of Milan. 'To act against the enemy successfully, we must act as one, under one head, with one aim.' He said this, adding that no heart in Italy had yearned more than his own for the signal to march for the Mincio and the Adige.

Vittoria determined to put him to one test. She summoned her boldness to crave grace for Agostino Balderini to return to Piedmont. The petition was immediately granted. Alluding to the libretto of *Camilla*, the king complimented Vittoria for her high courage on the night of the Fifteenth of the foregoing year. 'We in Turin were prepared, though we had only then the pleasure of hearing *of* you,' he said.

'I strove to do my best to help. I wish to serve our cause now,' she replied, feeling an inexplicable new sweetness running in her blood.

He asked her if she did not know that she had the power to move multitudes.

'Sire, singing appears so poor a thing in time of war.'

He remarked that wine was good for soldiers, singing better, such a voice as hers best of all.

For hours after the interview, Vittoria struggled with her deep blushes. She heard the drums of the regiments, the clatter of horses, the bugle-call of assembly, as so

many confirmatory notes that it was a royal hero who was going forth.

'He stakes a crown,' she said to Laura.

'Tush! it tumbles off his head if he refuses to venture something,' was Laura's response.

Vittoria reproached her for injustice.

'No,' Laura said; 'he is like a young man for whom his mother has made a match. And he would be very much in love with his bride if he were quite certain of winning her, or rather, if she would come a little more than halfway to meet him. Some young men are so composed. Genoa and Turin say, "Go and try." Milan and Venice say, "Come and have faith in us." My opinion is that he is quite as much propelled as attracted.'

'This is shameful,' said Vittoria.

'No; for I am quite willing to suspend my judgement. I pray that fortune may bless his arms. I do think that the stir of a campaign, and a certain amount of success will make him in earnest.'

'Can you look on his face and not see pure enthusiasm?'

'I see every feminine quality in it, my dear.'

'What can it be that he is wanting in?'

'Masculine ambition.'

'I am not defending him,' said Vittoria hastily.

'Not at all; and I am not attacking him. I can excuse his dread of Republicanism. I can fancy that there is reason for him just now to fear Republicanism worse than Austria. Paris and Milan are two grisly phantoms before him. These red spectres are born of earthquake, and are more given to shaking thrones than are hostile cannon-shot. Earthquakes are dreadfuller than common maladies to all of us. Fortune may help him, but he has not the look of one who commands her.

The face is not aquiline. There 's a light over him like the ray of a sickly star.'

'For that reason!' Vittoria burst out.

'Oh, for that reason we pity men, assuredly, my Sandra, but not kings. Luckless kings are not generous men, and ungenerous men are mischievous kings.'

'But if you find him chivalrous and devoted; if he proves his noble intentions, why not support him?'

'Dandle a puppet, by all means,' said Laura.

Her intellect, not her heart, was harsh to the king; and her heart was not mistress of her intellect in this respect, because she beheld riding forth at the head of Italy one whose spirit was too much after the pattern of her supple, springing, cowering, impressionable sex, alternately ardent and abject, chivalrous and treacherous, and not to be confided in firmly when standing at the head of a great cause.

Aware that she was reading him very strictly by the letters of his past deeds, which were not plain history to Vittoria, she declared that she did not countenance suspicion in dealing with the king, and that it would be a delight to her to hear of his gallant bearing on the battlefield. 'Or to witness it, my Sandra, if that were possible; —we two! For, should he prove to be no General, he has the courage of his family.'

Vittoria took fire at this. 'What hinders our following the army?'

'The less baggage the better, my dear.'

'But the king said that my singing——I have no right to think it myself.' Vittoria concluded her sentence with a comical intention of humility.

'It was a pretty compliment,' said Laura. 'You replied that singing is a poor thing in time of war, and I agree with you. We might serve as hospital nurses.'

'Why do we not determine?'

'We are only considering possibilities.'

'Consider the impossibility of our remaining quiet.'

'Fire that goes to flame is a waste of heat, my Sandra.'

The signora, however, was not so discreet as her speech. On all sides there was uproar and movement. High-born Italian ladies were offering their hands for any serviceable work. Laura and Vittoria were not alone in the desire which was growing to be resolution to share the hardships of the soldiers, to cherish and encourage them, and by seeing, to have the supreme joy of feeling the blows struck at the common enemy.

The opera closed when the king marched. Carlo Ammiani's letter was handed to Vittoria at the fall of the curtain on the last night.

Three paths were open to her: either that she should obey her lover, or earn an immense sum of money from Antonio-Pericles by accepting an immediate engagement in London, or go to the war. To sit in submissive obedience seemed unreasonable; to fly from Italy impossible. Yet the latter alternative appealed strongly to her sense of duty, and as it thereby threw her lover's commands into the background, she left it to her heart to struggle with Carlo, and thought over the two final propositions. The idea of being apart from Italy while the living country streamed forth to battle struck her inflamed spirit like the shock of a pause in martial music. Laura pretended to take no part in Vittoria's decision, but when it was reached, she showed her a travelling-carriage stocked with lint and linen, wine in jars, chocolate, cases of brandy, tea, coffee, needles, thread, twine, scissors, knives; saying, as she displayed them, 'There, my dear, *all* my money has gone in that equipment, so you must pay on the road.'

'This doesn't leave me a choice, then,' said Vittoria, joining her humour.

'Ah, but think over it,' Laura suggested.

'No! not think at all,' cried Vittoria.

'You do not fear Carlo's anger?'

'If I think, I am weak as water. Let us go.'

Countess d'Isorella wrote to Carlo: 'Your Vittoria is away after the king to Pavia. They tell me she stood up in her carriage on the Ponte del Po—"Viva il Re d'Italia!"—waving the cross of Savoy. As I have previously assured you, no woman is Republican. The demonstration was a mistake. Public characters should not let their personal preferences be trumpeted: a diplomatic truism:—but I must add, least of all a cantatrice for a king. The famous Greek amateur—the prop of failing finances—is after her to arrest her for breach of engagement. You wished to discover an independent mind in a woman, my Carlo; did you not? One would suppose her your wife—or widow. She looked a superb thing the last night she sang. She is not, in my opinion, wanting in height. If, behind all that innocence and candour, she has any trained artfulness, she will beat us all. Heaven bless your arms!'

The demonstration mentioned by the countess had not occurred.

Vittoria's letter to her lover missed him. She wrote from Pavia, after she had taken her decisive step.

Carlo Ammiani went into the business of the war with the belief that his betrothed had despised his prayer to her.

He was under Colonel Corte, operating on the sub-Alpine range of hills along the line of the Chiese South-eastward. Here the volunteers, formed of the best blood of Milan, the gay and brave young men, after marching in the pride of their strength to hold the Alpine passes and bar Austria from Italy while the fight went on below, were struck by a sudden paralysis. They hung aloft

there like an arm cleft from the body. Weapons, clothes, provisions, money, the implements of war, were withheld from them. The Piedmontese officers despatched to watch their proceedings laughed at them like exasperating senior scholars examining the accomplishments of a lower form. It was manifest that Count Medole and the Government of Milan worked everywhere to conquer the people for the king before the king had done a stroke to conquer the Austrians for the people; while, in order to reduce them to the condition of Piedmontese soldiery, the flame of their patriotic enthusiasm was systematically damped, and instead of apprentices in war, who possessed at any rate the elementary stuff of soldiers, miserable dummies were drafted into the royal service. The Tuscans and the Romans had good reason to complain on behalf of their princes, as had the Venetians and the Lombards for the cause of their Republic. Neither Tuscans, Romans, Venetians, nor Lombards, were offering up their lives simply to obtain a change of rulers; though all Italy was ready to bow in allegiance to a king of proved kingly quality. Early in the campaign the cry of treason was muttered, and on all sides such became the temper of the Alpine volunteers, that Angelo and Rinaldo Guidascarpi were forced to join their cousin under Corte, by the dispersion of their band, amounting to something more than eighteen hundred fighting lads, whom a Piedmontese superior officer summoned peremptorily to shout for the king. They thundered as one voice for the Italian Republic, and instantly broke up and disbanded. This was the folly of the young: Carlo Ammiani confessed that it was no better; but he knew that a breath of generous confidence from the self-appointed champion of the national cause would have subdued his impatience at royalty and given heart and cheer to his sickening comrades. He began to frown angrily when he thought

of Vittoria. 'Where is she now?—where now?' he asked himself in the season of his most violent wrath at the king. Her conduct grew inseparable in his mind from the king's deeds. The sufferings, the fierce irony, the very deaths of the men surrounding him in arms, rose up in accusation against the woman he loved.

CHAPTER XXXII

EPISODES OF THE REVOLT AND THE WAR

THE TREACHERY OF PERICLES—THE WHITE UMBRELLA—THE DEATH OF RINALDO GUIDASCARPI

The king crossed the Mincio. The Marshal, threatened on his left flank, drew in his line from the farther Veronese heights upon a narrowed battle-front before Verona. Here they manœuvred, and the opening successes fell to the king. Holding Peschiera begirt, with one sharp passage of arms he cleared the right bank of the Adige and stood on the semicircle of hills, master of the main artery into Tyrol.

The village of Pastrengo has given its name to the day. It was a day of intense heat coming after heavy rains. The arid soil steamed; the white powder-smoke curled in long horizontal columns across the hazy ring of the fight. Seen from a distance it was like a huge downy ball, kicked this way and that between the cypresses by invisible giants. A pair of eager-eyed women gazing on a battle-field for the first time could but ask themselves in bewilderment whether the fate of countries were verily settled in such a fashion. Far in the rear, Vittoria and Laura heard the cannon-shots; a sullen dull sound, as of a mallet striking upon rotten timber. They drove at

speed. The great thumps became varied by musketry volleys, that were like blocks of rock-boulder tumbled in the roll of a mountain torrent. These, then, were the voices of Italy and Austria speaking the devilish tongue of the final alternative. Cannon, rockets, musketry, and now the run of drums, now the ring of bugles, now the tramp of horses, and the field was like a landslip. A joyful bright black death-wine seemed to pour from the bugles all about. The women strained their senses to hear and see; they could realize nothing of a reality so absolute; their feelings were shattered, and crowded over them in patches;—horror, glory, panic, hope, shifted lights within their bosoms. The fascination and repulsion of the image of Force divided them. They feared; they were prostrate; they sprang in praise. The image of Force was god and devil to their souls. They strove to understand why the field was marked with blocks of men who made a plume of vapour here, and hurried thither. The action of their intellects resolved to a blank marvel at seeing an imminent thing—an interrogation to almighty heaven—treated with method, not with fury streaming forward. Cleave the opposing ranks! Cry to God for fire! Cut them through! They had come to see the Song of Deborah performed before their eyes, and they witnessed only a battle. Blocks of infantry gathered densely, thinned to a line, wheeled in column, marched: blocks of cavalry changed posts: artillery bellowed from one spot and quickly selected another. Infantry advanced in the wake of tiny smoke-puffs, halted, advanced again, rattled files of shots, became struck into knots, faced half about as from a blow of the back of a hand, retired orderly. Cavalry curved like a flickering scimetar in their rear; artillery plodded to its further station. Innumerable tiny smoke-puffs then preceded a fresh advance of infantry. The enemy were

on the hills and looked mightier, for they were revealed among red flashes of their guns, and stood partly visible above clouds of hostile smoke and through clouds of their own, which grasped viscously by the skirts of the hills. Yet it seemed a strife of insects, until, one by one, soldiers who had gone into yonder white pit for the bloody kiss of death, and had got it on their faces, were borne by. Vittoria and Laura knelt in this horrid stream of mortal anguish to give succour from their stores in the carriage. Their natural emotions were distraught. They welcomed the sight of suffering thankfully, for the poor blotted faces were so glad at sight of them. Torture was their key to the reading of the battle. They gazed on the field no longer, but let the roaring wave of combat wash up to them what it would.

The hill behind Pastrengo was twice stormed. When the bluecoats first fell back, a fine charge of Piedmontese horse cleared the slopes for a second effort, and they went up and on, driving the enemy from hill to hill. The Adige was crossed by the Austrians under cover of Tyrolese rifle-shots.

Then, with Beppo at their heels, bearing water, wine, and brandy, the women walked in the paths of carnage, and saw the many faces of death. Laura whispered strangely, 'How light-hearted they look!' The wounded called their comforters sweet names. Some smoked and some sang, some groaned; all were quick to drink. Their jokes at the dead were universal. They twisted their bodies painfully to stick a cigar between dead lips, and besprinkle them with the last drops of liquor in their cups, laughing a benediction. These scenes put grievous chains on Vittoria's spirit, but Laura evidently was not the heavier for them. Glorious Verona shone under the sunset as their own to come; Peschiera, on the blue lake, was in the hollow of their hands. 'Prizes worth any

quantity of blood,' said Laura. Vittoria confessed that she had seen enough of blood, and her aspect provoked Laura to utter, 'For God's sake, think of something miserable;—cry, if you can!'

Vittoria's underlip dropped sickly with the question, 'Why?'

Laura stated the physical necessity with Italian naïveté.

'If I can,' said Vittoria, and blinked to get a tear; but laughter helped as well to relieve her, and it came on their return to the carriage. They found the spy Luigi sitting beside the driver. He informed them that Antonio-Pericles had been in the track of the army ever since their flight from Turin; daily hurrying off with whip of horses at the sound of cannon-shot, and gradually stealing back to the extreme rear. This day he had flown from Oliosi to Cavriani, and was, perhaps, retracing his way already as before, on fearful toe-tips. Luigi acted the caution of one who stepped blindfolded across hot iron-plates. Vittoria, without a spark of interest, asked why the Signor Antonio should be following the army.

'Why, it 's to find *you*, signorina.'

Luigi's comical emphasis conjured up in a jumbled picture the devotion, the fury, the zeal, the terror of Antonio-Pericles—a mixture of demoniacal energy and ludicrous trepidation. She imagined his long figure, fantastical as a shadow, off at huge strides, and back, with eyes sliding swiftly to the temples, and his odd serpent's head raised to peer across the plains, and occasionally to exclaim to the reasonable heavens in anger at men and loathing of her. She laughed ungovernably. Luigi exclaimed that, albeit in disgrace with the Signor Antonio, he had been sent for to serve him afresh, and had now been sent forward to entreat the gracious signorina to grant her sincerest friend and

adorer an interview. She laughed at Pericles, but in truth she almost loved the man for his worship of her Art, and representation of her dear peaceful practice of it.

The interview between them took place at Oliosi. There, also, she met Georgiana Ford, the half-sister of Merthyr Powys, who told her that Merthyr and Augustus Gambier were in the ranks of a volunteer contingent in the king's army, and might have been present at Pastrengo. Georgiana held aloof from battlefields, her business being simply to serve as Merthyr's nurse in case of wounds, or to see the last of him in case of death. She appeared to have no enthusiasm. She seconded strongly the vehement persuasions addressed by Pericles to Vittoria. Her disapproval of the presence of her sex on fields of battle was precise. Pericles had followed the army to give Vittoria one last chance, he said, and drag her away from this sick country, as he called it, pointing at the dusty land from the windows of the inn. On first seeing her he gasped like one who has recovered a lost thing. To Laura he was a fool; but Vittoria enjoyed his wildest outbursts, and her half-sincere humility encouraged him to think that he had captured her at last. He enlarged on the perils surrounding her voice in dusty bellowing Lombardy, and on the ardour of his friendship in exposing himself to perils as tremendous, that he might rescue her. While speaking he pricked a lively ear for the noise of guns, hearing a gun in everything, and jumping to the window with horrid imprecations. His carriage was horsed at the doors below. Let the horses die, he said; let the coachman have sunstroke. Let hundreds perish, if Vittoria would only start in an hour—in two—to-night—to-morrow.

'Because, do you see,'—he turned to Laura and Georgiana, submitting to the vexatious necessity of seeming

reasonable to these creatures,—'she is a casket for one pearl. It is only one, but it is ONE, mon Dieu! and inscrutable heaven, mesdames, has made the holder of it mad. Her voice has but a sole skin; it is not like a body; it bleeds to death at a scratch. A spot on the pearl, and it is perished—pfoof! Ah, cruel thing! impious, I say. I have watched, I have reared her. Speak to me of mothers! I have cherished her for her splendid destiny—to see it go down, heels up, among quarrels of boobies! Yes; we have war in Italy. Fight! Fight in this beautiful climate that you may be dominated by a blue coat, not by a white coat. We are an intelligent race; we are a civilized people; we will fight for that. What has a voice of the very heavens to do with your fighting? I heard it first in England, in a fir-wood, in a month of Spring, at night-time, fifteen miles and a quarter from the city of London—oh, city of peace! Sandra—you will come there. I give you thousands additional to the sum stipulated. You have no rival. Sandra Belloni! no rival, I say'—he invoked her in English,—'and you here—you, to be a draggle-tail vivandière wiz a brandy-bottle at your hips and a reputation going like ze brandy. Ah! pardon, mesdames; but did mankind ever see a frenzy like this girl's? Speak, Sandra. I could cry it like Michiella to Camilla—Speak!'

Vittoria compelled him to despatch his horses to stables. He had relays of horses at war-prices between Castiglione and Pavia, and a retinue of servants; nor did he hesitate to inform the ladies that, before entrusting his person to the hazards of war, he had taken care to be provided with safe-conduct passes for both armies, as befitted a prudent man of peace—'or sense; it is one, mesdames.'

Notwithstanding his terror at the guns, and disgust at the soldiery and the bad fare at the inn, Vittoria's presence kept him lingering in this wretched place, though he cried

continually, 'I shall have heart-disease.' He believed at first that he should subdue her; then it became his intention to carry her off.

It was to see Merthyr that she remained. Merthyr came there the day after the engagement at Santa Lucia. They had not met since the days at Meran. He was bronzed, and keen with strife, and looked young, but spoke not over-hopefully. He scolded her for wishing to taste battle, and compared her to a bad swimmer on deep shores. Pericles bounded with delight to hear him, and said he had not supposed there was so much sense in Powys. Merthyr confessed that the Austrians had as good as beaten them at Santa Lucia. The tactical combinations of the Piedmontese were wretched. He was enamoured of the gallantry of the Duke of Savoy, who had saved the right wing of the army from rout while covering the backward movement. Why there had been any fight at all at Santa Lucia, where nothing was to be gained, much to be lost, he was incapable of telling; but attributed it to an antique chivalry on the part of the king, that had prompted the hero to a trial of strength, a bout of blood-letting.

'You do think he is a hero?' said Vittoria.

'He is; and he will march to Venice.'

'And open the opera at Venice,' Pericles sneered. 'Powys, mon cher, cure her of this beastly dream. It is a scandal to you to want a woman's help. You were defeated at Santa Lucia. I say bravo to anything that brings you to reason. Bravo! You hear me.'

The engagement at Santa Lucia was designed by the king to serve as an instigating signal for the Veronese to rise in revolt; and this was the secret of Charles Albert's stultifying manœuvres between Peschiera and Mantua. Instead of matching his military skill against the wary old Marshal's, he was offering incentives to conspiracy.

Distrusting the revolution, which was a force behind him, he placed such reliance on its efforts in his front as to make it the pivot of his actions.

'The volunteers North-east of Vicenza are doing the real work for us, I believe,' said Merthyr; and it seemed so then, as it might have been indeed, had they not been left almost entirely to themselves to do it.

These tidings of a fight lost set Laura and Vittoria quivering with nervous irritation. They had been on the field of Pastrengo, and it was won. They had been absent from Santa Lucia. What was the deduction? Not such as reason would have made for them; but they were at the mercy of the currents of the blood. 'Let us go on,' said Laura. Merthyr refused to convoy them. Pericles drove with him an hour on the road, and returned in glee, to find Vittoria and Laura seated in their carriage, and Luigi scuffling with Beppo.

'Padrone, see how I assist you,' cried Luigi.

Upon this Beppo instantly made a swan's neck of his body and trumpeted: 'A sally from the fortress for forage.'

'Whip! whip!' Pericles shouted to his coachman, and the two carriages parted company at the top of their speed.

Pericles fell a victim to a regiment of bersaglieri that wanted horses, and unceremoniously stopped his pair and took possession of them on the route for Peschiera. He was left in a stranded carriage between a dusty ditch and a mulberry bough. Vittoria and Laura were not much luckier. They were met by a band of deserters, who made no claim upon the horses, but stood for drink, and having therewith fortified their fine opinion of themselves, petitioned for money. A kiss was their next demand. Money and good humour saved the women from indignity. The band of rascals went off with a

'Viva l'Italia.' Such scum is upon every popular rising, as Vittoria had to learn. Days of rain and an incomprehensible inactivity of the royal army kept her at a miserable inn, where the walls were bare, the cock had crowed his last. The guns of Peschiera seemed to roam over the plain like an echo unwillingly aroused that seeks a hollow for its further sleep. Laura sat pondering for hours, harsh in manner, as if she hated her. 'I think,' she said once, 'that women are those persons who have done evil in another world.' The 'why?' from Vittoria was uttered simply to awaken friendly talk, but Laura relapsed into her gloom. A village priest, a sleek gentle creature, who shook his head to earth when he hoped, and filled his nostrils with snuff when he desponded, gave them occasional companionship under the title of consolation. He wished the Austrians to be beaten, remarking, however, that they were good Catholics, most fervent Catholics. As the Lord decided, so it would end! 'Oh, delicious creed!' Laura broke out: 'Oh, dear and sweet doctrine! that results and developments in a world where there is more evil than good are approved by heaven.' She twisted the mild man in supple steel of her irony so tenderly that Vittoria marvelled to hear her speak of him in abhorrence when they quitted the village. 'Not to be born a woman, and voluntarily to be a woman!' ejaculated Laura. 'How many, how many are we to deduct from the male population of Italy? Cross in hand, he should be at the head of our arms, not whimpering in a corner for white bread. Wretch! he makes the marrow in my bones rage at him. He chronicled a pig that squeaked.'

Why had she been so gentle with him?

'Because, my dear, when I loathe a thing I never care to exhaust my detestation before I can strike it,' said the true Italian.

They were on the field of Goito; it was won. It was won against odds. At Pastrengo they witnessed an encounter; this was a battle. Vittoria perceived that there was the difference between a symphony and a lyric song. The blessedness of the sensation that death can be light and easy dispossessed her of the meaner compassion, half made up of cowardice, which she had been nearly borne down by on the field of Pastrengo. At an angle on a height off the left wing of the royal army the face of the battle was plain to her: the movements of the troops were clear as strokes on a slate. Laura flung her life into her eyes, and knelt and watched, without summing one sole thing from what her senses received.

Vittoria said, 'We are too far away to understand it.'

'No,' said Laura, 'we are too far away to *feel* it.'

The savage soul of the woman was robbed of its share of tragic emotion by having to hold so far aloof. Flashes of guns were but flashes of guns up there where she knelt. She thirsted to read the things written by them; thirsted for their mystic terrors, somewhat as souls of great prophets have craved for the full revelation of those fitful underlights which inspired their mouths.

Charles Albert's star was at its highest when the Piedmontese drums beat for an advance of the whole line at Goito.

Laura stood up, white as furnace-fire. 'Women can do some good by praying,' she said. She believed that she had been praying. That was her part in the victory.

Rain fell as from the forehead of thunder. From black eve to black dawn the women were among dead and dying men, where the lanterns trailed a slow flame across faces that took the light and let it go. They returned to their carriage exhausted. The ways were almost impassable for carriage-wheels. While they were toiling on and exchanging their drenched clothes, Vittoria heard

Merthyr's voice speaking to Beppo on the box. He was saying that Captain Gambier lay badly wounded; brandy was wanted for him. She flung a cloak over Laura, and handed out the flask with a naked arm. It was not till she saw him again that she remembered or even felt that he had kissed the arm. A spot of sweet fire burned on it just where the soft fulness of a woman's arm slopes to the bend. He chid her for being on the field and rejoiced in a breath, for the carriage and its contents helped to rescue his wounded brother-in-arms from probable death. Gambier, wounded in thigh and ankle by rifle-shot, was placed in the carriage. His clothes were saturated with the soil of Goito; but wounded and wet, he smiled gaily, and talked sweet boyish English. Merthyr gave the driver directions to wind along up the Mincio. 'Georgiana will be at the nearest village—she has an instinct for battlefields, or keeps spies in her pay,' he said. 'Tell her I am safe. We march to cut them (the enemy) off from Verona, and I can't leave. The game is in our hands. We shall give you Venice.'

Georgiana was found at the nearest village. Gambier's wounds had been dressed by an army-surgeon. She looked at the dressing, and said that it would do for six hours. This singular person had fully qualified herself to attend on a soldier-brother. She had studied medicine for that purpose, and she had served as nurse in a London hospital. Her nerves were completely under control. She could sit in attendance by a sick-bed for hours, hearing distant cannon, and the brawl of soldiery and vagabonds in the street, without a change of countenance. Her dress was plain black from throat to heel, with a skull-cap of white, like a Moravian sister. Vittoria reverenced her; but Georgiana's manner in return was cold aversion, so much more scornful than disdain that it offended

Laura, who promptly put her finger on the blot in the fair character with the word 'Jealousy'; but a single word is too broad a mark to be exactly true. 'She is a perfect example of your English,' Laura said. 'Brave, good, devoted, admirable—ice the heart. The judge of others, of course. I always respected her; I never liked her; and I should be afraid of a comparison with her. Her management of the household of this inn is extraordinary.'

Georgiana condescended to advise Vittoria once more not to dangle after armies.

'I wish to wait here to assist you in nursing our friend,' said Vittoria.

Georgiana replied that her strength was unlikely to fail.

After two days of incessant rain, sunshine blazed over the watery Mantuan flats. Laura drove with Beppo to see whether the army was in motion, for they were distracted by rumours. Vittoria clung to her wounded friend, whose pleasure was the hearing her speak. She expected Laura's return by set of sun. After dark a messenger came to her, saying that the signora had sent a carriage to fetch her to Valeggio. Her immediate supposition was that Merthyr might have fallen. She found Luigi at the carriage-door, and listened to his mysterious directions and remarks that not a minute must be lost, without suspicion. He said that the signora was in great trouble, very anxious to see the signorina instantly; there was but a distance of five miles to traverse.

She thought it strange that the carriage should be so luxuriously fitted with lights and silken pillows, but her ideas were all of Merthyr, until she by chance discovered a packet marked '*chocolate*,' which told her at once that she was entrapped by Antonio-Pericles. Luigi would not answer her cry to him. After some fruitless tremblings of wrath, she lay back relieved by the feeling that

Merthyr was safe, come what might come to herself. Things could lead to nothing but an altercation with Pericles, and for this scene she prepared her mind. The carriage stopped while she was dozing. Too proud to supplicate in the darkness, she left it to the horses to bear her on, reserving her energies for the morning's interview, and saying, 'The farther he takes me the angrier I shall be.' She dreamed of her anger while asleep, but awakened so frequently during the night that morning was at her eyelids before they divided. To her amazement she saw the carriage surrounded by Austrian troopers. Pericles was spreading cigars among them, and addressing them affably. The carriage was on a good road, between irrigated flats, that flashed a lively green and bright steel-blue for miles away. She drew down the blinds to cry at leisure; her wings were clipped, and she lost heart. Pericles came round to her when the carriage had drawn up at an inn. He was egregiously polite, but modestly kept back any expressions of triumph. A body of Austrians, cavalry and infantry, were breaking camp. Pericles accorded her an hour of rest. She perceived that he was anticipating an outbreak of the anger she had nursed overnight and baffled him so far by keeping dumb. Luigi was sent up to her to announce the expiration of her hour of grace.

'Ah, Luigi!' she said. 'Signorina, only wait, and see how Luigi can serve two,' he whispered, writhing under the reproachfulness of her eyes. At the carriage-door she asked Pericles whither he was taking her. 'Not to Turin, not to London, Sandra Belloni!' he replied; 'not to a place where you are wet all night long, to wheeze for ever after it. Go in.' She entered the carriage quickly, to escape from staring officers, whose laughter rang in her ears and humbled her bitterly; she felt herself bringing dishonour on her lover. The carriage continued

in the track of the Austrians. Pericles was audibly careful to avoid the border regiments. He showered cigars as he passed; now and then he exhibited a paper; and on one occasion he brought a General officer to the carriage-door, opened it and pointed in. A white-helmeted dragoon rode on each side of the carriage for the remainder of the day. The delight of the supposition that these Austrians were retreating before the invincible arms of King Carlo Alberto kept her cheerful; but she heard no guns in the rear. A blocking of artillery and waggons compelled a halt, and then Pericles came and faced her. He looked profoundly ashamed of himself, ready as he was for an animated defence of his proceedings.

'Where are you taking me, sir?' she said in English.

'Sandra, will you be a good child? It is anywhere you please, if you will promise——'

'I will promise nothing.'

'Zen, I lock you up in Verona.'

'In Verona!'

'Sandra, will you promise to me?'

'I will promise nothing.'

'Zen I lock you up in Verona. It is settled. No more of it. I come to say, we shall not reach a village. I am sorry. We have soldiers for a guard. You draw out a board and lodge in your carriage as in a bed. Biscuits, potted meats, prunes, bon-bons, chocolate, wine—you shall find all at your right hand and your left. I am desolate in offending you. Sandra, if you will promise——'

'I will promise—this is what I will promise,' said Vittoria.

Pericles thrust his ear forward, and withdrew it as if it had been slapped.

She promised to run from him at the first opportunity,

to despise him ever after, and never to sing again in his hearing. With the darkness Luigi appeared to light her lamp; he mouthed perpetually, 'To-morrow, to-morrow.' The watchfires of Austrians encamped in the fields encircled her; and moving up and down, the cigar of Antonio-Pericles was visible. He had not eaten or drunk, and he was out there sleepless; he walked conquering his fears in the thick of war troubles: all for her sake. She watched critically to see whether the cigar-light was puffed in fretfulness. It burned steadily; and the thought of Pericles supporting patience quite overcame her. In a fit of humour that was almost tears, she called to him and begged him to take a place in the carriage and have food. 'If it is your pleasure,' he said; and threw off his cloak. The wine comforted him. Thereupon he commenced a series of strange gesticulations, and ended by blinking at the window, saying, 'No, no; it is impossible to explain. I have no voice; I am not gifted. It is,' he tapped at his chest, 'it is here. It is imprisoned in me.'

'What?' said Vittoria, to encourage him.

'It can never be explained, my child. Am I not respectful to you? Am I not worshipful to you? But, no! it can never be explained. Some do call me mad. I know it; I am laughed at. Oh! do I not know zat? Perfectly well. My ancestors adored Goddesses. I discover ze voice of a Goddess: I adore it. So you call me mad; it is to me—what you call me—juste ze same. I am possessed wiz passion for her voice. So it will be till I go to ashes. It is to me ze one zsing divine in a pig, a porpoise world. It is to me—I talk! It is unutterable —impossible to tell.'

'But I understand it; I know you must feel it,' said Vittoria.

'But you hate me, Sandra. You hate your Pericles.'

'No, I do not; you are my good friend, my good Pericles.'

'I am your good Pericles? So you obey me?'

'In what?'

'You come to London?'

'I shall not.'

'You come to Turin?'

'I cannot promise.'

'To Milan?'

'No; not yet.'

'Ungrateful little beast! minx! temptress! You seduce me into your carriage to feed me, to fill me, for to coax me,' cried Pericles.

'Am I the person to have abuse poured on *me*?' Vittoria rejoined, and she frowned. 'Might I not have called you a wretched whimsical money-machine, without the comprehension of a human feeling? You are doing me a great wrong—to win my submission, as I see, and it half amuses me; but the pretence of an attempt to carry me off from my friends is an offence that I should take certain care to punish in another. I do not give you any promise, because the first promise of all—the promise to keep one—is not in my power. Shut your eyes and sleep where you are, and in the morning think better of your conduct!'

'Of my conduct, mademoiselle!' Pericles retained this sentence in his head till the conclusion of her animated speech,—'of my conduct I judge better zan to accept of such a privilege as you graciously offer to me'; and he retired with a sour grin, very much subdued by her unexpected capacity for expression. The bugles of the Austrians were soon ringing. There was a trifle of a romantic flavour in the notes which Vittoria tried not to feel; the smart iteration of them all about her rubbed it off, but she was reduced to repeat them, and take

them in various keys. This was her theme for the day.

They were in the midst of mulberries, out of sight of the army; green mulberries, and the green and the bronze young vine-leaf. It was a delicious day, but she began to fear that she was approaching Verona, and that Pericles was acting seriously. The bronze young vine-leaf seemed to her like some warrior's face, as it would look when beaten by weather, burned by the sun. They came now to inns which had been visited by both armies. Luigi established communication with the innkeepers before the latter had stated the names of villages to Pericles, who stood map in hand, believing himself at last to be no more conscious of his position than an atom in a whirl of dust. Vittoria still refused to give him any promise, and finally, on a solitary stretch of the road, he appealed to her mercy. She was the mistress of the carriage, he said; he had never meant to imprison her in Verona; his behaviour was simply dictated by his adoration:—alas! This was true or not true, but it was certain that the ways were confounded to them. Luigi, despatched to reconnoitre from a neighbouring eminence, reported a Piedmontese encampment far ahead, and a walking tent that was coming on their route. The walking tent was an enormous white umbrella. Pericles advanced to meet it; after an interchange of opening formalities, he turned about and clapped hands. The umbrella was folded. Vittoria recognized the last man she would then have thought of meeting; he seemed to have jumped out of an ambush from Meran in Tyrol:—it was Wilfrid. Their greeting was disturbed by the rushing up of half-a-dozen troopers. The men claimed him as an Austrian spy. With difficulty Vittoria obtained leave to drive him on to their commanding officer. It appeared that the white umbrella was notorious for having

been seen on previous occasions threading the Piedmontese lines into and out of Peschiera. These very troopers swore to it; but they could not swear to Wilfrid, and white umbrellas were not absolutely uncommon. Vittoria declared that Wilfrid was an old English friend; Pericles vowed that Wilfrid was one of their party. The prisoner was clearly an Englishman. As it chanced, the officer before whom Wilfrid was taken had heard Vittoria sing on the great night at La Scala. 'Signorina, your word should pass the Austrian Field-Marshal himself,' he said, and merely requested Wilfrid to state on his word of honour that he was not in the Austrian service, to which Wilfrid unhesitatingly replied, 'I am not.'

Permission was then accorded to him to proceed in the carriage.

Vittoria held her hand to Wilfrid. He took the fingers and bowed over them.

He was perfectly self-possessed, and cool even under her eyes. Like a pedlar he carried a pack on his back, which was his life; for his business was a combination of scout and spy.

'You have saved me from a ditch to-day,' he said; 'every fellow has some sort of love for his life, and I must thank you for the odd luck of your coming by. I knew you were on this ground somewhere. If the rascals had searched me, I should not have come off so well. I did not speak falsely to that officer; I am *not* in the Austrian service. I am a volunteer spy. I am an unpaid soldier. I am the dog of the army—fetching and carrying for a smile and a pat on the head. I am ruined, and I am working my way up as best I can. My uncle disowns me. It is to General Schöneck that I owe this chance of re-establishing myself. I followed the army out of Milan. I was at Melegnano, at Pastrengo, at Santa Lucia. If I get nothing for it, the Lenkensteins at least shall not

say that I abandoned the flag in adversity. I am bound for Rivoli. The fortress (Peschiera) has just surrendered. The Marshal is stealing round to make a dash on Vicenza.' So far he spoke like one apart from her, but a flush crossed his forehead. 'I have not followed you. I have obeyed your brief directions. I saw this carriage yesterday in the ranks of our troops. I saw Pericles. I guessed who might be inside it. I let it pass me. Could I do more?'

'Not if you wanted to punish me,' said Vittoria.

She was afflicted by his refraining from reproaches in his sunken state.

Their talk bordered the old life which they had known, like a rivulet coming to falls where it threatens to be a torrent and a flood; like flame bubbling the wax of a seal. She was surprised to find herself expecting tenderness from him: and, startled by the languor in her veins, she conceived a contempt for her sex and her own weak nature. To mask that, an excessive outward coldness was assumed. 'You can serve as a spy, Wilfrid!'

The answer was ready: 'Having twice served as a traitor, I need not be particular. It is what my uncle and the Lenkensteins call me. I do my best to work my way up again. Despise me for it, if you please.'

On the contrary, she had never respected him so much. She got herself into opposition to him by provoking him to speak with pride of his army; but the opposition was artificial, and she called to Carlo Ammiani in heart. 'I will leave these places, cover up my head, and crouch till the struggle is decided.'

The difficulty was now to be happily rid of Wilfrid by leaving him in safety. Piedmontese horse scoured the neighbourhood, and any mischance that might befall him she traced to her hand. She dreaded at every instant to hear him speak of his love for her; yet how sweet it would have been to hear it,—to hear him speak of passionate

love; to shape it in deep music; to hear one crave for what she gave to another! 'I am sinking: I am growing degraded,' she thought. But there was no other way for her to quicken her imagination of her distant and offended lover. The sights on the plains were strange contrasts to these conflicting inner emotions: she seemed to be living in two divided worlds.

Pericles declared anew that she was mistress of the carriage. She issued orders: 'The nearest point to Rivoli, and then to Brescia.'

Pericles broke into shouts. 'She has arrived at her reason! Hurrah for Brescia! I beheld you,' he confessed to Wilfrid,—'it was on ze right of Mincio, my friend. I did not know you were so true for Art, or what a hand I would have reached to you! Excuse me now. Let us whip on. I am your banker. I shall desire you not to be shot or sabred. You are deserving of an effigy on a theatral grand staircase.' His gratitude could no further express itself. In joy he whipped the horses on. Fools might be fighting—he was the conqueror. From Brescia, one leap took him in fancy to London. He composed mentally a letter to be forwarded immediately to a London manager, directing him to cause the appearance of articles in the journals on the grand new prima donna, whose singing had awakened the people of Italy.

Another day brought them in view of the Lago di Garda. The flag of Sardinia hung from the walls of Peschiera. And now Vittoria saw the Pastrengo hills—dear hills, that drove her wretched languor out of her, and made her soul and body one again. The horses were going at a gallop. Shots were heard. To the left of them, somewhat in the rear, on higher ground, there was an encounter of a body of Austrians and Italians: Tyrolese riflemen and the volunteers. Pericles was raving. He refused to draw

the reins till they had reached the village, where one of the horses dropped. From the windows of the inn, fronting a clear space, Vittoria beheld a guard of Austrians surrounding two or more prisoners. A woman sat near them with her head buried in her lap. Presently an officer left the door of the inn and spoke to the soldiers. 'That is Count Karl von Lenkenstein,' Wilfrid said in a whisper. Pericles had been speaking with Count Karl and came up to the room, saying, 'We are to observe something; but we are safe; it is only fortune of war.' Wilfrid immediately went out to report himself. He was seen giving his papers, after which Count Karl waved his finger back to the inn, and he returned. Vittoria sprang to her feet at the words he uttered. Rinaldo Guidascarpi was one of the prisoners. The others Wilfrid professed not to know. The woman was the wife of Barto Rizzo.

In the great red of sunset the Tyrolese riflemen and a body of Italians in Austrian fatigue uniform marched into the village. These formed in the space before the inn. It seemed as if Count Karl were declaiming an indictment. A voice answered, 'I am the man.' It was clear and straight as a voice that goes up in the night. Then a procession walked some paces on. The woman followed. She fell prostrate at the feet of Count Karl. He listened to her and nodded. Rinaldo Guidascarpi stood alone with bandaged eyes. The woman advanced to him; she put her mouth on his ear; there she hung.

Vittoria heard a single shot. Rinaldo Guidascarpi lay stretched upon the ground, and the woman stood over him.

CHAPTER XXXIII

EPISODES OF THE REVOLT AND THE WAR

COUNT KARL LENKENSTEIN—THE STORY OF THE GUIDA-SCARPI—THE VICTORY OF THE VOLUNTEERS

The smoke of a pistol-shot thinned away while there was yet silence.

'It is a saving of six charges of Austrian ammunition,' said Pericles.

Vittoria stared at the scene, losing faith in her eyesight. She could in fact see no distinct thing beyond what appeared as an illuminated copper medallion, held at a great distance from her, with a dead man and a towering female figure stamped on it.

The events following were like a rush of water on her senses. There was fighting up the street of the village, and a struggle in the space where Rinaldo had fallen; successive yellowish shots under the rising moonlight, cries from Italian lips, quick words of command from German in Italian, and one sturdy bull's roar of a voice that called across the tumult to the Austro-Italian soldiery, '*Venite fratelli!*—come, brothers, come under our banner!' She heard 'Rinaldo!' called.

This was a second attack of the volunteers for the rescue of their captured comrades. They fought more desperately than on the hill outside the village: they fought with steel. Shot enfiladed them; yet they bore forward in a scattered body up to that spot where Rinaldo lay, shouting for him. There they turned,—they fled.

Then there was a perfect stillness, succeeding the strife as quickly, Vittoria thought, as a breath yielded succeeds a breath taken.

She accused the heavens of injustice.

Pericles, prostrate on the floor, moaned that he was wounded. She said, 'Bleed to death!'

'It is my soul, it is my soul is wounded for you, Sandra.'

'Dreadful craven man!' she muttered.

'When my soul is shaking for your safety, Sandra Belloni!' Pericles turned his ear up. 'For myself—not; it is for you, for you.'

Assured of the cessation of arms by delicious silence he jumped to his feet.

'Ah! brutes to fight. It is *immonde*; it is unnatural!'

He tapped his finger on the walls for marks of shot, and discovered a shot-hole in the wood-work, that had passed an arm's length above her head, into which he thrust his finger in an intense speculative meditation, shifting eyes from it to her, and throwing them aloft.

He was summoned to the presence of Count Karl, with whom he found Captain Weisspriess, Wilfrid, and officers of jägers and the Italian battalion. Barto Rizzo's wife was in a corner of the room. Weisspriess met him with a very civil greeting, and introduced him to Count Karl, who begged him to thank Vittoria for the aid she had afforded to General Schöneck's emissary in crossing the Piedmontese lines. He spoke in Italian. He agreed to conduct Pericles to a point on the route of his march, where Pericles and his precious prima donna—'our very good friend,' he said, jovially—could escape the risk of unpleasant mishaps, and arrive at Trent and cities of peace by easy stages. He was marching for the neighbourhood of Vicenza.

A little before dawn Vittoria came down to the carriage. Count Karl stood at the door to hand her in. He was young and handsome, with a soft flowing blonde moustache and pleasant eyes, a contrast to his brother Count Lenkenstein. He repeated his thanks to her, which

Pericles had not delivered; he informed her that she was by no means a prisoner, and was simply under the guardianship of friends—'though perhaps, signorina, you will not esteem this gentleman to be one of your friends.' He pointed to Weisspriess. The officer bowed, but kept aloof. Vittoria perceived a singular change in him: he had become pale and sedate. 'Poor fellow! he has had his dose,' Count Karl said. 'He is, I beg to assure you, one of your most vehement admirers.'

A piece of her property that flushed her with recollections, yet made her grateful, was presently handed to her, though not in her old enemy's presence, by a soldier. It was the silver-hilted dagger, Carlo's precious gift, of which Weisspriess had taken possession in the mountain-pass over the vale of Meran, when he fought the duel with Angelo. Whether intended as a peace-offering, or as a simple restitution, it helped Vittoria to believe that Weisspriess was no longer the man he had been.

The march was ready, but Barto Rizzo's wife refused to move a foot. The officers consulted. She was brought before them. The soldiers swore with jesting oaths that she had been carefully searched for weapons, and only wanted a whipping. 'She must have it,' said Weisspriess. Vittoria entreated that she might have a place beside her in the carriage. 'It is more than I would have asked of you; but if you are not afraid of her,' said Count Karl, with an apologetic shrug.

Her heart beat fast when she found herself alone with the terrible woman.

Till then she had never seen a tragic face. Compared with this tawny colourlessness, this evil brow, this shut mouth, Laura, even on the battle-field, looked harmless. It was like the face of a dead savage. The eyeballs were full on Vittoria, as if they dashed at an obstacle, not embraced an image. In proportion as they seemed to

widen about her, Vittoria shrank. The whole woman was blood to her gaze.

When she was capable of speaking, she said entreatingly—

'I knew his brother.'

Not a sign of life was given in reply.

Companionship with this ghost of broad daylight made the fluttering Tyrolese feathers at both windows a welcome sight.

Precautions had been taken to bind the woman's arms. Vittoria offered to loosen the cords, but she dared not touch her without a mark of assent.

'I know Angelo Guidascarpi, Rinaldo's brother,' she spoke again.

The woman's nostrils bent inward, as when the breath we draw is keen as a sword to the heart. Vittoria was compelled to look away from her.

At the midday halt Count Karl deigned to justify to her his intended execution of Rinaldo—the accomplice in the slaying of his brother Count Paul. He was evidently eager to obtain her good opinion of the Austrian military. 'But for this miserable spirit of hatred against us,' he said, 'I should have espoused an Italian lady'; and he asked, 'Why not? For that matter, in all but blood, we Lenkensteins are half Italian, except when Italy menaces the empire. Can you blame us for then drawing the sword in earnest?'

He proffered his version of the death of Count Paul. She kept her own silent in her bosom.

Clelia Guidascarpi, according to his statement, had first been slain by her brothers. Vittoria believed that Clelia had voluntarily submitted to death and died by her own hand. She was betrothed to an Italian nobleman of Bologna, the friend of the brothers. They had arranged the marriage; she accepted the betrothal. 'She loved

my brother, poor thing!' said Count Karl. 'She concealed it, and naturally. How could she take a couple of wolves into her confidence? If she had told the pair of ruffians that she was plighted to an Austrian, they would have quieted her at an earlier period. A woman! a girl—signorina! The intolerable cowardice amazes me. It amazes me that you or any one can uphold the character of such brutes. And when she was dead they lured my brother to the house and slew him; fell upon him with daggers, stretched him at the foot of her coffin, and then—what then?—ran! ran for their lives. One has gone to his account. We shall come across the other. He is among that volunteer party which attacked us yesterday. The body was carried off by them; it is sufficient testimony that Angelo Guidascarpi is in the neighbourhood. I should be hunting him now but that I am under orders to march South-east.'

The story, as Vittoria knew it, had a different, though yet a dreadful, colour.

'I could have hanged Rinaldo,' Count Karl said further. 'I suppose the rascals feared I should use my right, and that is why they sent their mad baggage of a woman to spare any damage to the family pride. If I had been a man to enjoy vengeance, the rope would have swung for him. In spite of provocation, I shall simply shoot the other; I pledge my word to it. They shall be paid in coin. I demand no interest.'

Weisspriess prudently avoided her. Wilfrid held aloof. She sat in garden shade till the bugle sounded. Tyrolese and Italian soldiers were gibing at her haggard companion when she entered the carriage. Fronting this dumb creature once more, Vittoria thought of the story of the brothers. She felt herself reading it from the very page. The woman looked that evil star incarnate which Laura said they were born under.

This is in brief the story of the Guidascarpi.

They were the offspring of a Bolognese noble house, neither wealthy nor poor. In her early womanhood, Clelia was left to the care of her brothers. She declined the guardianship of Countess Ammiani because of her love for them; and the three, with their passion of hatred to the Austrians inherited from father and mother, schemed in concert to throw off the Austrian yoke. Clelia had soft features of no great mark; by her colouring she was beautiful, being dark along the eyebrows, with dark eyes, and a surpassing richness of Venetian hair. Bologna and Venice were married in her aspect. Her brothers conceived her to possess such force of mind that they held no secrets from her. They did not know that the heart of their sister was struggling with an image of Power when she uttered hatred of it. She was in truth a woman of a soft heart, with a most impressionable imagination.

There were many suitors for the hand of Clelia Guidascarpi, though her dowry was not the portion of a fat estate. Her old nurse counselled the brothers that they should consent to her taking a husband. They fulfilled this duty as one that must be done, and she became sorrowfully the betrothed of a nobleman of Bologna; from which hour she had no cheerfulness. The brothers quitted Bologna for Venice, where there was the bed of a conspiracy. On their return they were shaken by rumours of their sister's misconduct. An Austrian name was allied to hers in busy mouths. A lady, their distant relative, whose fame was light, had withdrawn her from the silent house, and made display of her. Since she had seen more than an Italian girl should see, the brothers proposed to the nobleman her betrothed to break the treaty; but he was of a mind to hurry on the marriage, and recollecting now that she was but a woman, the brothers fixed a day for her espousals, tenderly, without

reproach. She had the choice of taking the vows or surrendering her hand. Her old nurse prayed for the day of her espousals to come with a quicker step.

One night she surprised Count Paul Lenkenstein at Clelia's window. Rinaldo was in the garden below. He moved to the shadow of a cypress, and was seen moving by the old nurse. The lover took the single kiss he had come for, was led through the chamber, and passed unchallenged into the street. Clelia sat between locked doors and darkened windows, feeling colder to the brothers she had been reared with than to all other men upon the earth. They sent for her after a lapse of hours. Her old nurse was kneeling at their feet. Rinaldo asked for the name of her lover. She answered with it. Angelo said, 'It will be better for you to die: but if you cannot do so easy a thing as that, prepare widow's garments.' They forced her to write three words to Count Paul, calling him to her window at midnight. Rinaldo fetched a priest: Angelo laid out two swords. An hour before the midnight, Clelia's old nurse raised the house with her cries. Clelia was stretched dead in her chamber. The brothers kissed her in turn, and sat, one at her head, one at her feet. At midnight her lover stood among them. He was gravely saluted, and bidden to look upon the dead body. Angelo said to him, 'Had she lived you should have wedded her hand. She is gone of her own free choice, and one of us follows her.' With the sweat of anguish on his forehead, Count Paul drew sword. The window was barred; six male domestics of the household held high lights in the chamber; the priest knelt beside one corpse, awaiting the other.

Vittoria's imagination could not go beyond that scene, but she looked out on the brother of the slain youth with great pity, and with a strange curiosity. The example given by Clelia of the possible love of an Italian girl for

the white uniform, set her thinking whether so monstrous a fact could ever be doubled in this world. 'Could it happen to me?' she asked herself, and smiled, as she half-fashioned the words on her lips, 'It is a pretty uniform.'

Her reverie was broken by a hiss of 'Traitress!' from the woman opposite.

She coloured guiltily, tried to speak, and sat trembling. A divination of intense hatred had perhaps read the thought within her breast: or it was a mere outburst of hate. The woman's face was like the wearing away of smoke from a spot whence shot has issued. Vittoria walked for the remainder of the day. That fearful companion oppressed her. She felt that one who followed armies should be cast in such a frame, and now desired with all her heart to render full obedience to Carlo, and abide in Brescia, or even in Milan—a city she thought of shyly.

The march was hurried to the slopes of the Vicentino, for enemies were thick in this district. Pericles refused to quit the soldiers, though Count Karl used persuasion. The young nobleman said to Vittoria, 'Be on your guard when you meet my sister Anna. I tell you, we can be as revengeful as any of you: but you will exonerate me. I do my duty; I seek to do no more.'

At an inn that they reached toward evening, she saw the innkeeper shoot a little ball of paper at an Italian corporal, who put his foot on it and picked it up. The soldier subsequently passed through the ranks of his comrades, gathering winks and grins. They were to have rested at the inn, but Count Karl was warned by scouts, which was sufficient to make Pericles cling to him in avoidance of the volunteers, of whom mainly he was in terror. He looked ague-stricken. He would not listen to her, or to reason in any shape. 'I am on the sea—shall I trust a boat? I stick to a ship,' he said. The soldiers

marched till midnight. It was arranged that the carriage should strike off for Schio at dawn. The soldiers bivouacked on the slope of one of the low undulations falling to the Vicentino plain. Vittoria spread her cloak, and lay under bare sky, not suffering the woman to be ejected from the carriage. Hitherto Luigi had avoided her. Under pretence of doubling Count Karl's cloak as a pillow for her head, he whispered, 'If the signorina hears shots let her lie on the ground flat as a sheet.' The peacefulness surrounding her precluded alarm. There was brilliant moonlight, and the host of stars, all dim; and first they beckoned her up to come away from trouble, and then, through long gazing, she had the fancy that they bent and swam about her, making her feel that she lay in the hollows of a warm hushed sea. She wished for her lover.

Men and officers were lying at a stone's-throw distant. The Tyrolese had lit a fire for cooking purposes, by which four of them stood, and, lifting hands, sang one of their mountain songs, that seemed to her to spring like clear water into air, and fall wavering as a feather falls, or the light about a stone in water. It lulled her to a half-sleep, during which she fancied hearing a broad imitation of a cat's-call from the mountains, that was answered out of the camp, and a talk of officers arose in connection with the response, and subsided. The carriage was in the shadows of the fire. In a little while Luigi and the driver began putting the horses to, and she saw Count Karl and Weisspriess go up to Luigi, who declared loudly that it was time. The woman inside was aroused. Weisspriess helped to drag her out. Luigi kept making much noise, and apologized for it by saying that he desired to awaken his master, who was stretched in a secure circle among the Tyrolese. Presently Vittoria beheld the woman's arms thrown out free; the next minute they were around the

body of Weisspriess, and a shrewd cry issued from Count Karl. Shots rang from the outposts; the Tyrolese sprang to arms; 'Sandra!' was shouted by Pericles; and once more she heard the *Venite fratelli!* of the bull's voice, and a stream of volunteers dashed at the Tyrolese with sword and dagger and bayonet. The Austro-Italians stood in a crescent line—the ominous form of incipient military insubordination. Their officers stormed at them, and called for Count Karl and for Weisspriess. The latter replied like a man stifling, but Count Karl's voice was silent.

'Weisspriess! here, to me!' the captain sang out in Italian.

'Ammiani! here, to me!' was replied.

Vittoria struck her hands together in electrical gladness at her lover's voice and name. It rang most cheerfully. Her home was in the conflict where her lover fought, and she muttered with ecstasy, 'We have met! we have met!' The sound of the keen steel, so exciting to dream of, paralyzed her nerves in a way that powder, more terrible for a woman's imagination, would not have done, and she could only feebly advance. It was a spacious moonlight, but the moonlight appeared to have got of a brassy hue to her eyes, though the sparkle of the steel was white; and she felt too, and wondered at it, that the cries and the noise went to her throat, as if threatening to choke her. Very soon she found herself standing there, watching for the issue of the strife, almost as dead as a weight in scales, incapable of clear vision.

Matched against the Tyrolese alone, the volunteers had an equal fight in point of numbers, and the advantage of possessing a leader; for Count Karl was down, and Weisspriess was still entangled in the woman's arms. When at last Wilfrid got him free, the unsupported Tyrolese were giving ground before Carlo Ammiani and his followers. These fought with stern fury, keeping close up to their

enemy, rarely shouting. They presented something like the line of a classic bow, with its arrow-head; while the Tyrolese were huddled in groups, and clubbed at them, and fell back for space, and ultimately crashed upon their betraying brothers-in-arms, swinging rifles and flying. The Austro-Italians rang out a Viva for Italy, and let them fly: they were swept from the scene.

Vittoria heard her lover addressing his followers. Then he and Angelo stood over Count Karl, whom she had forgotten. Angelo ran up to her, but gave place the moment Carlo came; and Carlo drew her by the hand swiftly to an obscure bend of the rolling ground, and stuck his sword in the earth, and there put his arms round her and held her fast.

'Obey me now,' were his first words.

'Yes,' she answered.

He was harsh of eye and tongue, not like the gentle youth she had been torn from at the door of La Scala.

'Return; make your way to Brescia. My mother is in Brescia. Milan is hateful. I throw myself into Vicenza. Can I trust you to obey?'

'Carlo, what evil have you heard of me?'

'I listen to no tales.'

'Let me follow you to Vicenza and be your handmaid, my beloved.'

'Say that you obey.'

'I have said it.'

He seemed to shut her in his heart, so closely was she enfolded.

'Since La Scala,' she murmured; and he bent his lips to her ear, whispering, 'Not one thought of another woman! and never till I die.'

'And I only of you, Carlo, and for you, my lover, my lover!'

'You love me absolutely?'

'I belong to you.'

'I could be a coward and pray for life to live to hear you say it.'

'I feel I breathe another life when you are away from me.'

'You belong to me; you are my own?'

'You take my voice, beloved.'

'And when I claim you, I am to have you?'

'Am I not in your hands?'

'The very instant I make my claim you will say yes?'

'I shall not have strength for more than to nod.'

Carlo shuddered at the delicious image of her weakness.

'My Sandra! Vittoria, my soul! my bride!'

'O my Carlo! Do you go to Vicenza? And did you know I was among these people?'

'You will hear everything from little Leone Rufo, who is wounded and accompanies you to Brescia. Speak of nothing. Speak my name, and look at me. I deserve two minutes of blessedness.'

'Ah, my dearest, if I am sweet to you, you might have many!'

'No; they begin to hum a reproach at me already, for I must be marching. Vicenza will soon bubble on a fire, I suspect. Comfort my mother; she wants a young heart at her elbow. If she is alone, she feeds on every rumour; other women scatter in emotions what poisons her. And when my bride is with her, I am between them.'

'Yes, Carlo, I will go,' said Vittoria, seeing her duty at last through tenderness.

Carlo sprang from her side to meet Angelo, with whom he exchanged some quick words. The bugle was sounding, and Barto Rizzo audible. Luigi came to her, ruefully announcing that the volunteers had sacked the carriage—behaved worse than the Austrians; and that

his padrone, the Signor Antonio-Pericles, was off like a gossamer. Angelo induced her to remain on the spot where she stood till the carriage was seen on the Schio road, when he led her to it, saying that Carlo had serious work to do. Count Karl Lenkenstein was lying in the carriage, supported by Wilfrid and by young Leone Rufo, who sat laughing, with one eye under a cross-bandage and an arm slung in a handkerchief. Vittoria desired to wait that she might see her lover once more; but Angelo entreated her that she should depart, too earnestly to leave her in doubt of there being good reason for it and for her lover's absence. He pointed to Wilfrid: 'Barto Rizzo captured this man; Carlo has released him. Take him with you to attend on his superior officer.' She drew Angelo's observation to the first morning colours over the peaks. He looked up, and she knew that he remembered that morning of their flight from the inn. Perhaps he then had the image of his brother in his mind, for the colours seemed to be plucking at his heart, and he said, 'I have lost him.'

'God help you, my friend!' said Vittoria, her throat choking.

Angelo pointed at the insensible nobleman: 'These live. I do not grudge him his breath or his chances; but why should these men take so much killing? Weisspriess has risen, as though I struck the blow of a babe. But we—one shot does for us! Nevertheless, signorina,' Angelo smiled firmly, 'I complain of nothing while we march forward.'

He kissed his hand to her, and turned back to his troop. The carriage was soon under the shadows of the mountains.

CHAPTER XXXIV

EPISODES OF THE REVOLT AND THE WAR

THE DEEDS OF BARTO RIZZO—THE MEETING AT ROVEREDO

At Schio there was no medical attendance to be obtained for Count Karl, and he begged so piteously to be taken on to Roveredo, that, on his promising to give Leone Rufo a pass, Vittoria decided to work her way round to Brescia by the Alpine route. She supposed Pericles to have gone off among the Tyrolese, and wished in her heart that Wilfrid had gone likewise, for he continued to wear that look of sad stupefaction which was the harshest reproach to her. Leone was unconquerably gay in spite of his wounds. He narrated the doings of the volunteers, with proud eulogies of Carlo Ammiani's gallant leadership; but the devices of Barto Rizzo appeared to have struck his imagination most. 'He is positively a cat—a great cat,' Leone said. 'He can run a day; he can fast a week; he can climb a house; he can drop from a crag; and he never lets go his hold. If he says a thing to his wife, she goes true as a bullet to the mark. The two make a complete piece of artillery. We are all for Barto, though our captain Carlo is often enraged with him. But there 's no getting on without him. We have found that.'

Rinaldo and Angelo Guidascarpi and Barto Rizzo had done many daring feats. They had first, heading about a couple of dozen out of a force of sixty, endeavoured to surprise the fortress Rocca d'Anfo in Lake Idro—an insane enterprise that touched on success, and would have been an achievement had all the men who followed them been made of the same desperate stuff. Beaten off, they

escaped up the Val di Ledro, and secretly entered Trent, where they hoped to spread revolt, but the Austrian commandant knew what a quantity of dry wood was in the city, and stamped his heel on sparks. A revolt was prepared notwithstanding the proclamation of imprisonment and death. Barto undertook to lead a troop against the Buon Consiglio barracks, while Angelo and Rinaldo cleared the ramparts. It chanced, whether from treachery or extra-vigilance was unknown, that the troops paid domiciliary visits an hour before the intended outbreak, and the three were left to accomplish their task alone. They remained in the city several days, hunted from house to house, and finally they were brought to bay at night on the roof of a palace where the Lenkenstein ladies were residing. Barto took his dagger between his teeth and dropped to the balcony of Lena's chamber. The brothers soon after found the roof-trap opened to them, and Lena and Anna conducted them to the postern-door. There Angelo asked whom they had to thank. The terrified ladies gave their name; upon hearing which, Rinaldo turned and said that he would pay for a charitable deed to the extent of his power, and would not meanly allow them to befriend persons who were to continue strangers to them. He gave the name of Guidascarpi, and relieved his brother, as well as himself, of a load of obligation, for the ladies raised wild screams on the instant. In falling from the walls to the road, Rinaldo hurt his foot. Barto lifted him on his back, and journeyed with him so till at the appointed place he met his wife, who dressed the foot, and led them out of the line of pursuit, herself bending under the beloved load. Her adoration of Rinaldo was deep as a mother's, pure as a virgin's, fiery as a saint's. Leone Rufo dwelt on it the more fervidly from seeing Vittoria's expression of astonishment. The woman led them to a cave in the

rocks, where she had stored provision and sat two days expecting the signal from Trent. They saw numerous bands of soldiers set out along the valleys—merry men whom it was Barto's pleasure to beguile by shouts, as a relief for his parched weariness upon the baking rock. Accident made it an indiscretion. A glass was levelled at them by a mounted officer, and they had quickly to be moving. Angelo knew the voice of Weisspriess in the word of command to the soldiers, and the call to him to surrender. Weisspriess followed them across the mountain track, keeping at their heels, though they doubled and adopted all possible contrivances to shake him off. He was joined by Count Karl Lenkenstein on the day when Carlo Ammiani encountered them, with the rear of Colonel Corte's band marching for Vicenza. In the collision between the Austrians and the volunteers, Rinaldo was taken fighting upon his knee-cap. Leone cursed the disabled foot which had carried the hero in action, to cast him at the mercy of his enemies; but recollection of that sight of Rinaldo fighting far ahead and alone, half-down like a scuttled ship, stood like a flower in the lad's memory. The volunteers devoted themselves to liberate or avenge him. It was then that Barto Rizzo sent his wife upon her mission. Leone assured Vittoria that Angelo was aware of its nature, and approved it—hoped that the same might be done for himself. He shook his head when she asked if Count Ammiani approved it likewise.

'Signorina, Count Ammiani has a grudge against Barto, though he can't help making use of him. Our captain Carlo is too much of a mere soldier. He would have allowed Rinaldo to be strung up, and Barto does not owe him obedience in those things.'

'But why did this Barto Rizzo employ a woman's hand?'

'The woman was capable. No man could have got permission to move freely among the rascal Austrians, even in the character of a deserter. She did, and she saved him from the shame of execution. And besides, it was her punishment. You are astonished? Barto Rizzo punishes royally. He never forgives, and he never persecutes; he waits for his opportunity. That woman disobeyed him once—once only; but once was enough. It occurred in Milan, I believe. She released an Austrian, or did something—I don't know the story exactly—and Barto said to her, "Now you can wash out your crime and send your boy to heaven unspotted, with one blow." I saw her set out to do it. She was all teeth and eyes, like a frightened horse; she walked like a Muse in a garden.'

Vittoria discovered that her presence among the Austrians had been known to Carlo. Leone alluded slightly to Barto Rizzo's confirmed suspicion of her, saying that it was his weakness to be suspicious of women. The volunteers, however, were all in her favour, and had jeered at Barto on his declaring that she might, in proof of her willingness to serve the cause, have used her voice for the purpose of subjugating the wavering Austro-Italians, who wanted as much coaxing as women. Count Karl had been struck to earth by Barto Rizzo. 'Not with his boasted neatness, I imagine,' Leone said. In fact, the dagger had grazed an ivory portrait of a fair Italian head wreathed with violets in Count Karl's breast.

Vittoria recognized the features of Violetta d'Isorella as the original of the portrait.

They arrived at Roveredo late in the evening. The wounded man again entreated Vittoria to remain by him till a messenger should bring one of his sisters from Trent. 'See,' she said to Leone, 'how I give grounds for suspicion of me; I nurse an enemy.'

'Here is a case where Barto is distinctly to blame,' the lad replied. 'The poor fellow must want nursing, for he can't smoke.'

Anna von Lenkenstein came from Trent to her brother's summons. Vittoria was by his bedside, and the sufferer had fallen asleep with his head upon her arm. Anna looked upon this scene with more hateful amazement than her dull eyelids could express. She beckoned imperiously for her to come away, but Vittoria would not allow him to be disturbed, and Anna sat and faced her. The sleep was long. The eyes of the two women met from time to time, and Vittoria thought that Barto Rizzo's wife, though more terrible, was pleasanter to behold, and less brutal, than Anna. The moment her brother stirred, Anna repeated her imperious gesture, murmuring, 'Away! out of my sight!' With great delicacy of touch she drew the arm from the pillow and thrust it back, and then motioning in an undisguised horror, said 'Go.' Vittoria rose to go.

'Is it my Lena?' came from Karl's faint lips.

'It is your Anna.'

'I should have known,' he moaned.

Vittoria left them.

Some hours later, Countess Lena appeared, bringing a Trentino doctor. She said when she beheld Vittoria, 'Are you our evil genius, then?' Vittoria felt that she must necessarily wear that aspect to them.

Still greater was Lena's amazement when she looked on Wilfrid. She passed him without a sign.

Vittoria had to submit to an interview with both sisters before her departure. Apart from her distress on their behalf, they had always seemed as very weak, flippant young women to her, and she could have smiled in her heart when Anna pointed to a day of retribution in the future.

'I shall not seek to have you assassinated,' Anna said; 'do not suppose that I mean the knife or the pistol. But your day will come, and I can wait for it. You murdered my brother Paul: you have tried to murder my brother Karl. I wish you to leave this place convinced of one thing:—you shall be repaid for it.'

There was no direct allusion either to Weisspriess or to Wilfrid.

Lena spoke of the army. 'You think our cause is ruined because we have insurrection on all sides of us: you do not know our army. We can fight the Hungarians with one hand, and you Italians with the other —with a little finger. On what spot have we given way? We have to weep, it is true; but tears do not testify to defeat; and already I am inclined to pity those fools who have taken part against us. Some have experienced the fruits of their folly.'

This was the nearest approach to a hint at Wilfrid's misconduct.

Lena handed Leone's pass to Vittoria, and drawing out a little pocket almanac, said, 'You proceed to Milan, I presume. I do not love your society, Mademoiselle Belloni—or Campa: yet I do not mind making an appointment—the doctor says a month will set my brother on his feet again,—I will make an appointment to meet you in Milan or Como, or anywhere in your present territories, during the month of August. That affords time for a short siege and two pitched battles.'

She appeared to be expecting a retort.

Vittoria replied, 'I could beg one thing on my knees of you, Countess Lena.'

'And that is——?' Lena threw her head up superbly.

'Pardon my old friend the service he did me through friendship.'

The sisters interchanged looks. Lena flushed angrily.

Anna said, 'The person to whom you allude is here.'

'He is attending on your brother.'

'Did he help this last assassin to escape, perchance?'

Vittoria sickened at the cruel irony, and felt that she had perhaps done ill in beginning to plead for Wilfrid.

'He is here; let him speak for himself: but listen to him, Countess Lena.'

'A dishonourable man had better be dumb,' interposed Anna.

'Ah! it is I who have offended you.'

'Is that his excuse?'

Vittoria kept her eyes on the fiercer sister, who now declined to speak.

'I will not excuse my own deeds; perhaps I cannot. We Italians are in a hurricane; I cannot reflect. It may be that I do not act more thinkingly than a wild beast.'

'You have spoken it,' Anna exclaimed.

'Countess Lena, he fights in your ranks as a common soldier. He encounters more than a common soldier's risks.'

'The man is brave,—we knew that,' said Anna.

'He is more than brave, he is devoted. He fights against us, without hope of reward from you. Have I utterly ruined him?'

'I imagine that you may regard it as a fact that you have utterly ruined him,' said Anna, moving to break up the parting interview. Lena turned to follow her.

'Ladies, if it is I who have hardened your hearts, I am more guilty than I thought.' Vittoria said no more. She knew that she had been speaking badly, or ineffectually, by a haunting flatness of sound, as of an unstrung instrument, in her ears: she was herself unstrung and dispirited, while the recollection of Anna's voice was like a sombre conquering monotony on a low chord, with which she felt insufficient to compete.

Leone was waiting in the carriage to drive to the ferry across the Adige. There was news in Roveredo of the king's advance upon Rivoli; and Leone sat trying to lift and straighten out his wounded arm, with grimaces of laughter at the pain of the effort, which resolutely refused to acknowledge him to be an able combatant. At the carriage-door Wilfrid bowed once over Vittoria's hand.

'You see that,' Anna remarked to her sister.

'I should have despised him if he had acted indifference,' replied Lena.

She would have suspected him—that was what her heart meant; the artful show of indifference had deceived her once. The anger within her drew its springs much more fully from his refusal to respond to her affection, when she had in a fit of feminine weakness abased herself before him on the night of the Milanese revolt, than from the recollection of their days together in Meran. She had nothing of her sister's unforgivingness. And she was besides keenly curious to discover the nature of the charm Vittoria threw on him, and not on him solely. Vittoria left Wilfrid to better chances than she supposed. 'Continue fighting with your army,' she said, when they parted. The deeper shade which traversed his features told her that, if she pleased, her sway might still be active; but she had no emotion to spare for sentimental regrets. She asked herself whether a woman who has cast her lot in scenes of strife does not lose much of her womanhood and something of her truth; and while her imagination remained depressed, her answer was sad. In that mood she pitied Wilfrid with a reckless sense of her inability to repay him for the harm she had done him. The tragedies written in fresh blood all about her, together with that ever-present image of the fate of Italy hanging in the balance, drew her away from personal reflections. She felt as one in a war-chariot, who has not

time to cast more than a glance on the fallen. At the place where the ferry is, she was rejoiced by hearing positive news of the proximity of the Royal army. There were none to tell her that Charles Albert had here made his worst move by leaving Vicenza to the operations of the enemy, that he might become master of a point worthless when Vicenza fell into the enemy's hands. The old Austrian Field-Marshal had eluded him at Mantua on that very night when Vittoria had seen his troops in motion. The daring Austrian flank-march on Vicenza, behind the fortresses of the Quadrilateral, was the capital stroke of the campaign. But the presence of a Piedmontese vanguard at Rivoli flushed the Adige with confidence, and Vittoria went on her way sharing the people's delight. She reached Brescia to hear that Vicenza had fallen. The city was like a landscape smitten black by the thunder-cloud. Vittoria found Countess Ammiani at her husband's tomb, stiff, colourless, lifeless as a monument attached to the tomb.

CHAPTER XXXV

CLOSE OF THE LOMBARD CAMPAIGN—VITTORIA'S PERPLEXITY

The fall of Vicenza turned a tide that had overflowed its barriers with force enough to roll it to the Adriatic. From that day it was as if a violent wind blew East over Lombardy; flood and wind breaking here and there a tree, bowing everything before them. City, fortress, and battlefield resisted as the eddy whirls. Venice kept her brave colours streaming aloft in a mighty grasp despite the storm, but between Venice and Milan there was this

unutterable devastation,—so sudden a change, so complete a reversal of the shield, that the Lombards were at first incredulous even in their agony, and set their faces against it as at a monstrous eclipse, as though the heavens were taking false oath of its being night when it was day. From Vicenza and Rivoli, to Sommacampagna, and across Monte Godio to Custozza, to Volta on the right of the Mincio, up to the gates of Milan, the line of fire travelled, with a fantastic overbearing swiftness that, upon the map, looks like the zig-zag elbowing of a field-rocket. Vicenza fell on the 11th of June; the Austrians entered Milan on the 6th of August. Within that short time the Lombards were struck to the dust.

Countess Ammiani quitted Brescia for Bergamo before the worst had happened; when nothing but the king's retreat upon the Lombard capital, after the good fight at Volta, was known. According to the king's proclamation the Piedmontese army was to defend Milan, and hope was not dead. Vittoria succeeded in repressing all useless signs of grief in the presence of the venerable lady, who herself showed none, but simply recommended her accepted daughter to pray daily. 'I can neither confess nor pray,' Vittoria said to the priest, a comfortable, irritable ecclesiastic, long attached to the family, and little able to deal with this rebel before Providence, that would not let her swollen spirit be bled. Yet she admitted to him that the countess possessed resources which she could find nowhere; and she saw the full beauty of such inimitable grave endurance. Vittoria's foolish trick of thinking for herself made her believe, nevertheless, that the countess suffered more than she betrayed; was less consoled than her spiritual comforter imagined. She continued obstinate and unrepentant, saying, 'If my punishment is to come, it will at least bring experience with it, and I shall know why I am punished. The misery

now is that I do not know, and do not see, the justice of the sentence.'

Countess Ammiani thought better of her case than the priest did; or she was more indulgent, or half indifferent. This girl was Carlo's choice;—a strange choice, but the times were strange, and the girl was robust. The channels of her own and her husband's house were drying on all sides; the house wanted resuscitating. There was promise that the girl would bear children of strong blood. Countess Ammiani would not for one moment have allowed the spiritual welfare of the children to hang in dubitation, awaiting their experience of life; but a certain satisfaction was shown in her faint smile when her confessor lamented over Vittoria's proud stony state of moral revolt. She said to her accepted daughter, 'I shall expect you to be prepared to espouse my son as soon as I have him by my side'; nor did Vittoria's silent bowing of her face assure her that strict obedience was implied. Precise words—'I will,' and 'I will not fail'—were exacted. The countess showed some emotion after Vittoria had spoken. 'Now, may God end this war quickly, if it is to go against us,' she exclaimed, trembling in her chair visibly a half-minute, with dropped eyelids and lips moving.

Carlo had sent word that he would join his mother as early as he was disengaged from active service, and meantime requested her to proceed to a villa on Lago Maggiore. Vittoria obtained permission from the countess to order the route of the carriage through Milan, where she wished to take up her mother and her maid Giacinta. For other reasons she would have avoided the city. The thought of entering it was painful with the shrewdest pain. Dante's profoundly human line seemed branded on the forehead of Milan.

The morning was dark when they drove through the

streets of Bergamo. Passing one of the open places, Vittoria beheld a great concourse of volunteer youth and citizens, all of them listening to the voice of one who stood a few steps above them holding a banner. She gave an outcry of bitter joy. It was the Chief. On one side of him was Agostino, in the midst of memorable heads that were unknown to her. The countess refused to stay, though Vittoria strained her hands together in extreme entreaty that she might for a few moments hear what the others were hearing. 'I speak for my son, and I forbid it,' Countess Ammiani said. Vittoria fell back and closed her eyes to cherish the vision. All those faces raised to the one speaker under the dark sky were beautiful. He had breathed some new glory of hope in them, making them shine beneath the overcast heavens, as when the sun breaks from an evening cloud and flushes the stems of a company of pine-trees.

Along the road to Milan she kept imagining his utterance until her heart rose with music. A delicious stream of music, thin as poor tears, passed through her frame, like a life reviving. She reached Milan in a mood to bear the idea of temporary defeat. Music had forsaken her so long that celestial reassurance seemed to return with it.

Her mother was at Zotti's, very querulous, but determined not to leave the house and the few people she knew. She had, as she told her daughter, fretted so much on her account that she hardly knew whether she was glad to see her. Tea, of course, she had given up all thoughts of; but now coffee was rising, and the boasted sweet bread of Lombardy was something to look at! She trusted that Emilia would soon think of singing no more, and letting people rest: she might sing when she wanted money. A letter recently received from Mr. Pericles said that Italy was her child's ruin, and she hoped Emilia was ready to do as he advised, and hurry to England,

where singing did not upset people, and people lived like real Christians, not——. Vittoria flapped her hand, and would not hear of the unchristian crimes of the South. As regarded the expected defence of Milan, the little woman said, that if it brought on a bombardment, she would call it unpardonable wickedness, and only hoped that her daughter would repent.

Zotti stood by, interpreting the English to himself by tones. 'The amiable donnina is not of our persuasion,' he observed. 'She remains dissatisfied with patriotic Milan. I have exhibited to her my dabs of bread through all the processes of making and baking. It is in vain. She rejects analogy. She is wilful as a principessina:— *'Tis so! 'tis not so! 'tis my will! be silent, thou!* Signora, I have been treated in that way by your excellent mother.'

'Zotti has not been paid for three weeks, and he certainly has not mentioned it or looked it, I will say, Emilia.'

'Zotti has had something to think of during the last three weeks,' said Vittoria, touching him kindly on the arm.

The confectioner lifted his fingers and his big brown eyes after them, expressive of the unutterable thoughts. He informed her that he had laid in a stock of flour, in the expectation that Carlo Alberto would defend the city. The Milanese were ready to aid him, though some, as Zotti confessed, had ceased to effervesce; and a great number who were perfectly ready to fight regarded his tardy appeal to Italian patriotism very coldly. Zotti set out in person to discover Giacinta. The girl could hardly fetch her breath when she saw her mistress. She was in Laura's service, and said that Laura had brought a wounded Englishman from the field of Custozza. Vittoria hurried to Laura, with whom she found Merthyr,

blue-white as a corpse, having been shot through the body. His sister was in one of the Lombard hamlets, unaware of his fall; Beppo had been sent to her.

They noticed one another's embrowned complexions, but embraced silently. 'Twice widowed!' Laura said when they sat together. Laura hushed all speaking of the war or allusion to a single incident of the miserable campaign, beyond the bare recital of Vittoria's adventures; yet when Vicenza by chance was mentioned, she burst out: 'They are not cities, they are living shrieks. They have been made impious for ever. Burn them to ashes, that they may not breathe foul upon heaven!' She had clung to the skirts of the army as far as the field of Custozza. 'He,' she said, pointing to the room where Merthyr lay,—'he groans less than the others I have nursed. Generally, when they looked at me, they appeared obliged to recollect that it was not I who had hurt them. Poor souls! some ended in great torment. I think of them as the happiest; for pain is a cloak that wraps you about, and I remember one middle-aged man who died softly at Custozza, and said, "Beaten!" To take that thought as your travelling companion into the gulf, must be worse than dying of agony; at least, I think so.'

Vittoria was too well used to Laura's way of meeting disaster to expect from her other than this ironical fortitude, in which the fortitude leaned so much upon the irony. What really astonished her was the conception Laura had taken of the might of Austria. Laura did not directly speak of it, but shadowed it in allusive hints, much as if she had in her mind the image of an iron roller going over a field of flowers—hateful, imminent, irresistible. She felt as a leaf that has been flying before the gale.

Merthyr's wound was severe. Vittoria could not leave

him. Her resolution to stay in Milan brought her into collision with Countess Ammiani, when the countess reminded her of her promise, sedately informing her that she was no longer her own mistress, and had a primary duty to fulfil. She offered to wait three days, or until the safety of the wounded man was medically certified to. It was incomprehensible to her that Vittoria should reject her terms; and though it was true that she would not have listened to a reason, she was indignant at not hearing one given in mitigation of the offence. She set out alone on her journey, deeply hurt. The reason was a feminine sentiment, and Vittoria was naturally unable to speak it. She shrank with pathetic horror from the thought of Merthyr's rising from his couch to find her a married woman, and desired most earnestly that her marriage should be witnessed by him. Young women will know how to reconcile the opposition of the sentiment. Had Merthyr been only slightly wounded, and sound enough to seem to be able to bear a bitter shock, she would not have allowed her personal feelings to cause chagrin to the noble lady. The sight of her dear stedfast friend prostrate in the cause of Italy, and who, if he lived to rise again, might not have his natural strength to bear the thought of her loss with his old brave firmness, made it impossible for her to act decisively in one direct line of conduct.

Countess Ammiani wrote brief letters from Luino and Pallanza on Lago Maggiore. She said that Carlo was in the Como mountains; he would expect to find his bride, and would accuse his mother; 'but his mother will be spared those reproaches,' she added, 'if the last shot fired kills, as it generally does, the bravest and the dearest.'

'If it should!'—the thought rose on a quick breath in Vittoria's bosom, and the sentiment which held her away dispersed like a feeble smoke, and showed her another view of her features. She wept with longing for love

and dependence. She was sick of personal freedom, tired of the exercise of her will, only too eager to give herself to her beloved. The blessedness of marriage, of peace and dependence, came on her imagination like a soft breeze from a hidden garden, like sleep. But this very longing created the resistance to it in the depths of her soul. There was a light as of reviving life, or of pain comforted, when it was she who was sitting by Merthyr's side, and when at times she saw the hopeless effort of his hand to reach to hers, or during the long still hours she laid her head on his pillow, and knew that he breathed gratefully. The sweetness of helping him, and of making his breathing pleasant to him, closed much of the world which lay beyond her windows to her thoughts, and surprised her with an unknown emotion, so strange to her that when it first swept up her veins she had the fancy of her having been touched by a supernatural hand, and heard a flying accord of instruments. She was praying before she knew what prayer was. A crucifix hung over Merthyr's head. She had looked on it many times, and looked on it still, without seeing more than the old sorrow. In the night it was dim. She found herself trying to read the features of the thorn-crowned Head in the solitary night. She and it were alone with a life that was faint above the engulphing darkness. She prayed for the life, and trembled, and shed tears, and would have checked them; they seemed to be bearing away her little remaining strength. The tears streamed. No answer was given to her question, 'Why do I weep?' She wept when Merthyr had passed the danger, as she had wept when the hours went by with shrouded visages; and though she felt the difference in the springs of her tears, she thought them but a simple form of weakness showing shade and light.

These tears were a vanward wave of the sea to follow;

the rising of her voice to heaven was no more than a twitter of the earliest dawn before the coming of her soul's outcry.

'I have had a weeping fit,' she thought, and resolved to remember it tenderly, as being associated with her friend's recovery, and a singular masterful power absolutely to look on the Austrians marching up the streets of Milan, and not to feel the surging hatred, or the nerveless despair, which she had supposed must be her alternatives.

It is a mean image to say that the entry of the Austrians into the reconquered city was like a river of oil permeating a lake of vinegar, but it presents the fact in every sense. They demanded nothing more than submission, and placed a gentle foot upon the fallen enemy; and wherever they appeared they were isolated. The deepest wrath of the city was, nevertheless, not directed against them, but against Carlo Alberto, who had pledged his honour to defend it, and had forsaken it. Vittoria committed a public indiscretion on the day when the king left Milan to its fate: word whereof was conveyed to Carlo Ammiani, and he wrote to her.

'It is right that I should tell you what I have heard,' the letter said. 'I have heard that my bride drove up to the crowned traitor, after he had unmasked himself, and when he was quitting the Greppi palace, and that she kissed his hand before the people—poor bleeding people of Milan! This is what I hear in the Val d'Intelvi:—that she despised the misery and just anger of the people, and, by virtue of her name and mine, obtained a way for him. How can she have acted so as to give a colour to this infamous scandal? True or false, it does not affect my love for her. Still, my dearest, what shall I say? You keep me divided in two halves. My heart is out of me; and if I had a will, I think I should be harsh with you. You are absent from my mother at a time when

we are about to strike another blow. Go to her. It is kindness; it is charity: I do not say duty. I remember that I did write harshly to you from Brescia. Then our march was so clear in view that a little thing ruffled me. Was it a little thing? But to applaud the Traitor now! To uphold him who has spilt our blood only to hand the country over to the old gaolers! He lent us his army like a Jew, for huge interest. Can you not read him? If not, cease, I implore you, to think at all for yourself.

'Is this a lover's letter? I know that my beloved will see the love in it. To me your acts are fair and good as the chronicle of a saint. I find you creating suspicion—almost justifying it in others, and putting your name in the mouth of a madman who denounces you. I shall not speak more of him. Remember that my faith in you is unchangeable, and I pray you to have the same in me.

'I sent you a greeting from the Chief. He marched in the ranks from Bergamo. I saw him on the line of march strip off his coat to shelter a young lad from the heavy rain. He is not discouraged; none are who have been near him.

'Angelo is here, and so is our Agostino; and I assure you he loads and fires a carbine much more deliberately than he composes a sonnet. I am afraid that your adored Antonio-Pericles fared badly among our fellows, but I could gather no particulars.

'Oh! the bright two minutes when I held you right in my heart. That spot on the Vicentino is alone unclouded. If I live I will have that bit of ground. I will make a temple of it. I could reach it blindfolded.'

A townsman of Milan brought this letter to Vittoria. She despatched Luigi with her reply, which met the charge in a straightforward affirmative.

'I was driving to Zotti's by the Greppi palace, when I saw the king come forth, and the people hooted him. I

stood up, and petitioned to kiss his hand. The people knew me. They did not hoot any more for some time.

'So that you have heard the truth, and you must judge me by it. I cannot even add that I am sorry, though I strive to wish that I had not been present. I might wish it really, if I did not feel it to be a cowardly wish.

'Oh, my Carlo! my lover! my husband! you would not have me go against my nature? I have seen the king upon the battlefield. He has deigned to speak to me of Italy and our freedom. I have seen him facing our enemy; and to see him hooted by the people, and in misfortune and with sad eyes!—he looked sad and nothing else—and besides, I am sure I *know* the king. I mean that I understand him. I am half ashamed to write so boldly, even to you. I say to myself you should know *me*, at least; and if I am guilty of a piece of vanity, you should know that also. Carlo Alberto is quite unlike other men. He worships success as much; but they are not, as he is, so much bettered by adversity. *Indeed* I do not believe that he has exact *intentions* of any sort, or ever had the intention to betray us, or has done so in reality, that is, meaningly, of his own will. Count Medole and his party did, as you know, offer Lombardy to him, and Venice gave herself—brave, noble Venice! Oh! if we two were there—Venice has England's sea-spirit. But did we not flatter the king? And ask yourself, my Carlo, could a king move in such an enterprise as a common person? Ought we not to be in union with Sardinia? How can we be if we reject her king? Is it not the only positive army that we can look to—I mean regular army? Should we not make some excuses for one who is not in our position?

'I feel that I push my questions like waves that fall and cannot get beyond—they crave so for answers agreeing to them. This should make me doubt myself, perhaps;

but they crowd again, and seem so conclusive until I have written them down. I am unworthy to struggle with your intellect; but I say to myself, how unworthy of you I should be if I did not use my own, such as it is! The poor king had to conclude an armistice to save his little kingdom. Perhaps we ought to think of that sternly. My heart is filled with pity.

'It cannot but be right that you should know the worst of me. I call you my husband, and tremble to be permitted to lean my head on your bosom for hours, my sweet lover! And yet my cowardice, if I had let the king go by without a reverential greeting from me, in his adversity, would have rendered me insufferable to myself. You are hearing me, and I am compelled to say, that rather than behave so basely I would forfeit your love, and be widowed till death should offer us for God to join us. Does your face change to me?

'Dearest, and I say it when the thought of you sets me almost swooning. I find my hands clasped, and I am muttering I know not what, and I am blushing. The ground seems to rock; I can barely breathe; my heart is like a bird caught in the hands of a cruel boy: it will not rest. I fear everything. I hear a whisper, *"Delay not an instant!"* and it is like a furnace; *"Hasten to him! Speed!"* and I seem to totter forward and drop —I think I have lost you—I am like one dead.

'I remain here to nurse our dear friend Merthyr. For that reason I am absent from your mother. It is her desire that we should be married.

'Soon, soon, my own soul!

'I seem to be hanging on a tree for you, swayed by such a teazing wind.

'Oh, soon! or I feel that I shall hate any vestige of will that I have in this head of mine. Not in the heart—it is not there!

'And sometimes I am burning to sing. The voice leaps to my lips; it is quite like a thing that lives apart—my prisoner.

'It is true, Laura is here with Merthyr.

'Could you come at once?—not here, but to Pallanza? We shall both make our mother happy. This she wishes, this she lives for, this consoles her—and oh, this gives me peace! Yes, Merthyr is recovering! I can leave him without the dread I had; and Laura confesses to the feminine sentiment, if her funny jealousy of a rival nurse is really simply feminine. She will be glad of our resolve, I am sure. And then you will order all my actions; and I shall be certain that they are such as I would proudly call mine; and I shall be shut away from the world. Yes; let it be so! Addio. I reserve all sweet names for you. Addio. In Pallanza:—no, not Pallanza —Paradise!

'Hush! and do not smile at me:—it was not my *will*, I discover, but my *want of will*, that distracted me.

'See my last signature of—not Vittoria; for I may sign that again and still be Emilia Alessandra Ammiani—

'Sandra Belloni.'

The letter was sealed; Luigi bore it away, and a brief letter to Countess Ammiani, in Pallanza, as well.

Vittoria was relieved of her anxiety concerning Merthyr by the arrival of Georgiana, who had been compelled to make her way round by Piacenza and Turin, where she had left Gambier, with Beppo in attendance on him. Georgiana at once assumed all the duties of head-nurse, and the more resolutely because of her brother's evident moral weakness in sighing for the hand of a fickle girl to smooth his pillow. 'When he is stronger you can sit beside him a little,' she said to Vittoria, who surrendered her post without a struggle, and rarely saw him, though

Laura told her that his frequent exclamation was her name, accompanied by a soft look at his sister—'which would have stirred my heart like poor old Milan last March,' Laura added, with a lift of her shoulders.

Georgiana's icy manner appeared infinitely strange to Vittoria when she heard from Merthyr that his sister had become engaged to Captain Gambier.

'Nothing softens these women,' said Laura, putting Georgiana in a class.

'I wish you could try the effect of your winning Merthyr,' Vittoria suggested.

'I remember that when I went to my husband, I likewise wanted every woman of my acquaintance to be married.' Laura sighed deeply. 'What is this poor withered body of mine now? It feels like an old volcano, *cindery*, with fire somewhere:—a charming bride! My dear, if I live till my children make me a grandmother, I shall look on the love of men and women as a toy that I have played with. A new husband? I must be dragged through the Circles of Dante before I can conceive it, and then I should loathe the stranger.'

News came that the volunteers were crushed. It was time for Vittoria to start for Pallanza, and she thought of her leave-taking; a final leave-taking, in one sense, to the friends who had cared too much for her. Laura delicately drew Georgiana aside in the sick-room, which she would not quit, and alluded to the necessity for Vittoria's departure without stating exactly wherefore: but Georgiana was a Welshwoman. Partly to show her accurate power of guessing, and chiefly that she might reprove Laura's insulting whisper, which outraged and irritated her as much as if 'Oh! your poor brother!' had been exclaimed, she made display of Merthyr's manly coldness by saying aloud, 'You mean, that she is going to her marriage.' Laura turned her face to Merthyr. He had striven to rise

on his elbow, and had dropped flat in his helplessness. Big tears were rolling down his cheeks. His articulation failed him, beyond a reiterated 'No, no,' pitiful to hear, and he broke into childish sobs. Georgiana hurried Laura from the room. By-and-by the doctor was promptly summoned, and it was Georgiana herself, miserably humbled, who obtained Vittoria's sworn consent to keep the life in Merthyr by lingering yet awhile.

Meantime Luigi brought a letter from Pallanza in Carlo's handwriting. This was the burden of it:—

'I am here, and you are absent. Hasten!'

CHAPTER XXXVI

A FRESH ENTANGLEMENT

The Lenkenstein ladies returned to Milan proudly in the path of the army which they had followed along the city walls on the black March midnight. The ladies of the Austrian aristocracy generally had to be exiles from Vienna, and were glad to flock together even in an alien city. Anna and Lena were aware of Vittoria's residence in Milan, through the interchange of visits between the Countess of Lenkenstein and her sister Signora Piaveni. They heard also of Vittoria's prospective and approaching marriage to Count Ammiani. The Duchess of Graätli, who had forborne a visit to her unhappy friends, lest her Austrian face should wound their sensitiveness, was in company with the Lenkensteins one day, when Irma di Karski called on them. Irma had come from Lago Maggiore, where she had left her patron, as she was pleased to term Antonio-Pericles. She was full of

Roma

chatter of that most worthy man's deplorable experiences of Vittoria's behaviour to him during the war, and of many things besides. According to her account, Vittoria had enticed him from place to place with promises that the next day, and the next day, and the day after, she would be ready to keep her engagement to go to London, and at last she had given him the slip and left him to be plucked like a pullet by a horde of volunteer banditti, out of whose hands Antonio-Pericles—'one of our richest millionaires in Europe, certainly our richest amateur,' said Irma—escaped in fit outward condition for the garden of Eden.

Count Karl was lying on the sofa, and went into endless invalid's laughter at the picture presented by Irma of the 'wild man' wanderings of poor infatuated Pericles, which was exaggerated, though not intentionally, for Irma repeated the words and gestures of Pericles in the recital of his tribulations. Being of a somewhat similar physical organization, she did it very laughably. Irma declared that Pericles was cured of his infatuation. He had got to Turin, intending to quit Italy for ever, when—'he met me,' said Irma modestly.

'And heard that the war was at an end,' Count Karl added.

'And he has taken the superb Villa Ricciardi, on Lago Maggiore, where he will have a troupe of singers, and perform operas, in which I believe I may possibly act as prima donna. The truth is, I would do anything to prevent him from leaving the country.'

But Irma had more to say; with 'I bear no malice,' she commenced it. The story she had heard was that Count Ammiani, after plighting himself to a certain signorina, known as Vittoria Campa, had received tidings that she was one of those persons who bring discredit on Irma's profession. 'Gifted by nature, I can acknowledge,'

said Irma; 'but devoured by vanity—a perfect slave to the appetite for praise; ready to forfeit anything for flattery! Poor Signor Antonio-Pericles!—he knows her.' And now Count Ammiani, persuaded to reason by his mother, had given her up. There was nothing more positive, for Irma had seen him in the society of Countess Violetta d'Isorella.

Anna and Lena glanced at their brother Karl.

'I should not allude to what is not notorious,' Irma pursued. 'They are always together. My dear Antonio-Pericles is most amusing in his expressions of delight at it. For my part, though she served me an evil turn once,—you will hardly believe, ladies, that in her jealousy of me she was guilty of the most shameful machinations to get me out of the way on the night of the first performance of *Camilla*,—but, for my part, I bear no malice. The creature is an inveterate rebel, and I dislike her for that, I do confess.'

'The Signorina Vittoria Campa is my particular and very dear friend,' said the duchess.

'She is not the less an inveterate rebel,' said Anna.

Count Karl gave a long-drawn sigh. 'Alas, that she should have brought discredit on Fräulein di Karski's profession!'

The duchess hurried straightway to Laura, with whom was Count Serabiglione, reviewing the present posture of affairs from the condescending altitudes of one that has foretold it. Laura and Amalia embraced and went apart. During their absence Vittoria came down to the count and listened to a familiar illustration of his theory of the relations which should exist between Italy and Austria, derived from the friendship of those two women.

'What I wish you to see, signorina, is that such an alliance is possible; and, if we supply the brains, as we

do, is by no means likely to be degrading. These bears are absolutely on their knees to us for good fellowship. You have influence, you have amazing wit, you have unparalleled beauty, and, let me say it with the utmost sadness, you have now had experience. Why will you not recognize facts? Italian unity! I have exposed the fatuity—who listens? Italian freedom! I do not attempt to reason with my daughter. She is pricked by an envenomed fly of Satan. Yet, behold her and the duchess! It is the very union I preach; and I am, I declare to you, signorina, in great danger. I feel it, but I persist. I am in danger' (Count Serabiglione bowed his head low) 'of the transcendent sin of scorn of my species.'

The little nobleman swayed deploringly in his chair. 'Nothing is so perilous for a soul's salvation as that. The one sane among madmen! The one whose reason is left to him among thousands who have forsaken it! I beg you to realize the idea. The Emperor, as I am given to understand, is about to make public admission of my services. I shall be all the more hated. Yet it is a considerable gain. I do not deny that I esteem it as a promotion for my services. I shall not be the first martyr in this world, signorina.'

Count Serabiglione produced a martyr's smile.

'The profits of my expected posts will be,' he was saying, with a reckoning eye cast upward into his cranium for accuracy, when Laura returned, and Vittoria ran out to the duchess. Amalia repeated Irma's tattle. A curious little twitching of the brows at Violetta d'Isorella's name marked the reception of it.

'She is most lovely,' Vittoria said.

'And absolutely reckless.'

'She is an old friend of Count Ammiani's.'

'And you have an old friend here. But the old friend

of a young woman—I need not say further than that it is different.'

The duchess used the privilege of her affection, and urged Vittoria not to trifle with her lover's impatience.

Admitted to the chamber where Merthyr lay, she was enabled to make allowance for her irresolution. The face of the wounded man was like a lake-water taking light from Vittoria's presence.

'This may go on for weeks,' she said to Laura.

Three days later, Vittoria received an order from the Government to quit the city within a prescribed number of hours, and her brain was racked to discover why Laura appeared so little indignant at the barbarous act of despotism. Laura undertook to break the bad news to Merthyr. The parting was as quiet and cheerful as, in the opposite degree, Vittoria had thought it would be melancholy and regretful. 'What a Government!' Merthyr said, and told her to let him hear of any changes. 'All changes that please my friends please me.'

Vittoria kissed his forehead with one grateful murmur of farewell to the bravest heart she had ever known. The going to her happiness seemed more like going to something fatal until she reached the Lago Maggiore. There she saw September beauty, and felt as if the splendour encircling her were her bridal decoration. But no bridegroom stood to greet her on the terrace-steps between the potted orange and citron-trees. Countess Ammiani extended kind hands to her at arm's length.

'You have come,' she said. 'I hope that it is not too late.'

Vittoria was a week without sight of her lover: nor did Countess Ammiani attempt to explain her words, or speak of other than common daily things. In body and soul Vittoria had taken a chill. The silent blame resting on her in this house called up her pride, so that she would

not ask any questions; and when Carlo came, she wanted warmth to melt her. Their meeting was that of two passionless creatures. Carlo kissed her loyally, and courteously inquired after her health and the health of friends in Milan, and then he rallied his mother. Agostino had arrived with him, and the old man, being in one of his soft moods, unvexed by his conceits, Vittoria had some comfort from him of a dull kind. She heard Carlo telling his mother that he must go in the morning. Agostino replied to her quick look at him, 'I stay'; and it seemed like a little saved from the wreck, for she knew that she could speak to Agostino as she could not to the countess. When his mother prepared to retire, Carlo walked over to his bride, and repeated rapidly and brightly his inquiries after friends in Milan. She, with a pure response to his natural-unnatural manner, spoke of Merthyr Powys chiefly: to which he said several times, 'Dear fellow!' and added, 'I shall always love Englishmen for his sake.'

This gave her one throb. 'I could not leave him, Carlo.'

'Certainly not, certainly not,' said Carlo. 'I should have been happy to wait on him myself. I was busy; I am still. I dare say you have guessed that I have a new journal in my head: the *Pallanza Iris* is to be the name of it;—to be printed in three colours, to advocate three principles, in three styles. The Legitimists, the Moderates, and the Republicans are to proclaim themselves in its columns in prose, poetry, and hotch-potch. Once an editor, always an editor. The authorities suspect that something of the sort is about to be planted, so I can only make occasional visits here:—therefore, as you will believe,'—Carlo let his voice fall—'I have good reason to hate them still. They may cease to persecute me soon.'

He insisted upon lighting his mother to her room.

Vittoria and Agostino sat talking of the Chief and the minor events of the war—of Luciano, Marco, Giulio, and Ugo Corte—till the conviction fastened on them that Carlo would not return, when Agostino stood up and said, yawning wearily, 'I 'll talk further to you, my child, to-morrow.'

She begged that it might be now.

'No; to-morrow,' said he.

'Now, now!' she reiterated, and brought down a reproof from his forefinger.

'The poetic definition of "now" is that it is a small boat, my daughter, in which the female heart is constantly pushing out to sea and sinking. "To-morrow" is an island in the deeps, where grain grows. When I land you there, I will talk to you.'

She knew that he went to join Carlo after he had quitted her.

Agostino was true to his promise next day. He brought her nearer to what she had to face, though he did not help her vision much. Carlo had gone before sunrise.

They sat on the terrace above the lake, screened from the sunlight by thick myrtle bushes. Agostino smoked his loosely-rolled cigarettes, and Vittoria sipped chocolate and looked upward to the summit of the Motterone, with many thoughts and images in her mind.

He commenced by giving her a love-message from Carlo. 'Hold fast to it that he means it: conduct is never a straight index where the heart 's involved,' said the chuckling old man; 'or it is not in times like ours. You have been in the wrong, and your having a good excuse will not help you before the deciding fates. Woman that you are! did you not think that because we were beaten we were going to rest for a very long while, and that your Carlo of yesterday was going to be your Carlo of to-day?'

Vittoria tacitly confessed to it.

'Ay,' he pursued, 'when you wrote to him in the Val d'Intelvi, you supposed you had only to say, "I am ready," which was then the case. You made your summer and left the fruits to hang, and now you are astounded that seasons pass and fruits drop. You should have come to this place, if but for a pair of days, and so have fixed one matter in the chapter. This is how the chapter has run on. I see I talk to a stunned head; you are thinking that Carlo's love for you can't have changed: and it has not, but occasion has gone and *times* have changed. Now listen. The countess desired the marriage. Carlo could not go to you in Milan with the sword in his hand. Therefore you had to come to him. He waited for you, perhaps for his own preposterous lover's sake as much as to make his mother's heart easy. If she loses him she loses everything, unless he leaves a wife to her care and the hope that her House will not be extinct, which is possibly not much more the weakness of old aristocracy than of human nature.

'Meantime, his brothers-in-arms had broken up and entered Piedmont, and he remained waiting for you still. You are thinking that he had not waited a month. But if four months finished Lombardy, less than one month is quite sufficient to do the same for us little beings. He met the Countess d'Isorella here. You have to thank her for seeing him at all, so don't wrinkle your forehead yet. Luciano Romara is drilling his men in Piedmont; Angelo Guidascarpi has gone there. Carlo was considering it his duty to join Luciano, when he met this lady, and she has apparently succeeded in altering his plans. Luciano and his band will go to Rome. Carlo fancies that another blow will be struck for Lombardy. This lady should know; the point is, whether she can be trusted. She persists in declaring that Carlo's duty is to remain, and

—I cannot tell how, for I am as a child among women—she has persuaded him of her sincerity. Favour me now with your clearest understanding, and deliver it from feminine sensations of any description for just two minutes.'

Agostino threw away the end of a cigarette and looked for firmness in Vittoria's eyes.

'This Countess d'Isorella is opposed to Carlo's marriage at present. She says that she is betraying the king's secrets, and has no reliance on a woman. As a woman you will pardon her, for it is the language of your sex. You are also denounced by Barto Rizzo, a madman—he went mad as fire, and had to be chained at Varese. In some way or other Countess d'Isorella got possession of him; she has managed to subdue him. A sword-cut he received once in Verona has undoubtedly affected his brain, or caused it to be affected under strong excitement. He is at her villa, and she says—perhaps with some truth—that Carlo would in several ways lose his influence by his immediate marriage with you. The reason must have weight; otherwise he would fulfil his mother's principal request, and be at the bidding of his own desire. There; I hope I have spoken plainly.'

Agostino puffed a sigh of relief at the conclusion of his task.

Vittoria had been too strenuously engaged in defending the steadiness of her own eyes to notice the shadow of an assumption of frankness in his.

She said that she understood.

She got away to her room like an insect carrying a load thrice its own size. All that she could really gather from Agostino's words was, that she felt herself rocking in a tower, and that Violetta d'Isorella was beautiful. She had striven hard to listen to him with her wits alone, and her sensations subsequently revenged themselves in this

fashion. The tower rocked and struck a bell that she discovered to be her betraying voice uttering cries of pain. She was for hours incapable of meeting Agostino again. His delicate intuition took the harshness off the meeting. He led her even to examine her state of mind, and to discern the fancies from the feelings by which he was agitated. He said shrewdly and bluntly, 'You can master pain, but not doubt. If you show a sign of unhappiness, remember that I shall know you doubt both what I have told you, and Carlo as well.'

Vittoria fenced: 'But is there such a thing as happiness?'

'I should imagine so,' said Agostino, touching her cheek, 'and slipperiness likewise. There 's patience at any rate; only you must dig for it. You arrive at nothing, but the eternal digging constitutes the object gained. I recollect when I was a raw lad, full of ambition, in love, and without a franc in my pockets, one night in Paris, I found myself looking up at a street lamp; there was a moth in it. He couldn't get out, so he had very little to trouble his conscience. I think he was near happiness: he ought to have been happy. My luck was not so good, or you wouldn't see me still alive, my dear.'

Vittoria sighed for a plainer speaker.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ON LAGO MAGGIORE

Carlo's hours were passed chiefly across the lake, in the Piedmontese valleys. When at Pallanza he was restless, and he shunned the two or three minutes of privacy with

his betrothed which the rigorous Italian laws besetting courtship might have allowed him to take. He had perpetually the look of a man starting from wine. It was evident that he and Countess d'Isorella continued to hold close communication, for she came regularly to the villa to meet him. On these occasions Countess Ammiani accorded her one ceremonious interview, and straightway locked herself in her room. Violetta's grace of ease and vivacity soared too high to be subject to any hostile judgement of her character. She seemed to rely entirely on the force of her beauty, and to care little for those who did not acknowledge it. She accepted public compliments quite royally, nor was Agostino backward in offering them. 'And you have a voice, you know,' he sometimes said aside to Vittoria; but she had forgotten how easily she could swallow great praise of her voice; she had almost forgotten her voice. Her delight was to hang her head above inverted mountains in the lake, and dream that she was just something better than the poorest of human creatures. She could not avoid putting her mind in competition with this brilliant woman's, and feeling eclipsed; and her weakness became pitiable. But Countess d'Isorella mentioned once that Pericles was at the Villa Ricciardi, projecting magnificent operatic entertainments. The reviving of a passion to sing possessed Vittoria like a thirst for freedom, and instantly confused all the reflected images within her, as the fury of a sudden wind from the high Alps scourges the glassy surface of the lake. She begged Countess Ammiani's permission that she might propose to Pericles to sing in his private operatic company, in any part, at the shortest notice.

'You wish to leave me?' said the countess, and resolutely conceived it.

Speaking to her son on this subject, she thought it necessary to make some excuse for a singer's instinct, who

really did not live save on the stage. It amused Carlo; he knew when his mother was really angry with persons she tried to shield from the anger of others; and her not seeing the wrong on his side in his behaviour to his betrothed was laughable. Nevertheless she had divined the case more correctly than he: the lover was hurt. After what he had endured, he supposed, with all his forgiveness, that he had an illimitable claim upon his bride's patience. He told his mother to speak to her openly.

'Why not you, my Carlo?' said the countess.

'Because, mother, if I speak to her, I shall end by throwing out my arms and calling for the priest.'

'I would clap hands to that.'

'We will see; it may be soon or late, but it can't be now.'

'How much am I to tell her, Carlo?'

'Enough to keep her from fretting.'

The countess then asked herself how much she knew. Her habit of receiving her son's word and will as supreme kept her ignorant of anything beyond the outline of his plans; and being told to speak openly of them to another, she discovered that her acquiescing imagination supplied the chief part of her knowledge. She was ashamed also to have it thought, even by Carlo, that she had not gathered every detail of his occupation, so that she could not argue against him, and had to submit to see her dearest wishes lightly swept aside.

'I beg you to tell me what you think of Countess d'Isorella; not the afterthought,' she said to Vittoria.

'She is beautiful, dear Countess Ammiani.'

'Call me mother now and then. Yes; she is beautiful. She has a bad name.'

'Envy must have given it, I think.'

'Of course she provokes envy. But I say that her

name is bad, as envy could not make it. She is a woman who goes on missions, and carries a husband into society like a passport. You have only thought of her beauty?'

'I can see nothing else,' said Vittoria, whose torture at the sight of the beauty was appeased by her disingenuous pleading on its behalf.

'In my time Beauty was a sinner,' the countess resumed. 'My confessor has filled my ears with warnings that it is a net to the soul, a weapon for devils. May the saints of Paradise make bare the beauty of this woman. She has persuaded Carlo that she is serving the country. You have let him lie here alone in a fruitless bed, silly girl. He stayed for you while his comrades called him to Vercelli, where they are assembled. The man whom he salutes as his Chief gave him word to go there. They are bound for Rome. Ah me! Rome is a great name, but Lombardy is Carlo's natal home, and Lombardy bleeds. You were absent—how long you were absent! If you could know the heaviness of those days of his waiting for you. And it was I who kept him here! I must have omitted a prayer, for he would have been at Vercelli now with Luciano and Emilio, and you might have gone to him; but he met this woman, who has convinced him that Piedmont will make a Winter march, and that his marriage must be delayed.' The countess raised her face and drooped her hands from the wrists, exclaiming, 'If I have lately omitted one prayer, enlighten me, blessed heaven! I am blind; I cannot see for my son; I am quite blind. I do not love the woman; therefore I doubt myself. You, my daughter, tell me your thought of her, tell me what you think. Young eyes observe; young heads are sometimes shrewd in guessing.'

Vittoria said, after a pause, 'I will believe her to be true, if she supports the king.' It was hardly truthful speaking on her part.

'How can Carlo have been persuaded!' the countess sighed.

'By me?' Vittoria asked herself, and for a moment she was exulting.

She spoke from that emotion when it had ceased to animate her.

'Carlo was angry with the king. He echoed Agostino, but Agostino does not sting as he did, and Carlo cannot avoid seeing what the king has sacrificed. Perhaps the Countess d'Isorella has shown him promises of fresh aid in the king's handwriting. Suffering has made Carlo Alberto one with the Republicans, if he had other ambitions once. And Carlo dedicates his blood to Lombardy: he does rightly. Dear countess—my mother! I have made him wait for me; I will be patient in waiting for him. I know that Countess d'Isorella is intimate with the king. There is a man named Barto Rizzo, who thinks me a guilty traitress, and she is making use of this man. That must be her reason for prohibiting the marriage. She cannot be false if she is capable of uniting extreme revolutionary agents and the king in one plot, I think; I do not know.' Vittoria concluded her perfect expression of confidence with this atoning doubtfulness.

Countess Ammiani obtained her consent that she would not quit her side.

After Violetta had gone, Carlo, though he shunned secret interviews, addressed his betrothed as one who was not strange to his occupation and the trial his heart was undergoing. She could not doubt that she was beloved, in spite of the colourlessness and tonelessness of a love that appealed to her intellect. He showed her a letter he had received from Laura, laughing at its abuse of Countess d'Isorella, and the sarcasms levelled at himself.

In this letter Laura said that she was engaged in something besides nursing.

Carlo pointed his finger to the sentence, and remarked, 'I must have your promise—a word from you is enough —that you will not meddle with any intrigue.'

Vittoria gave the promise, half trusting it to bring the lost bloom of their love to him; but he received it as a plain matter of necessity. Certain of his love, she wondered painfully that it should continue so barren of music.

'Why am I to pledge myself that I will be useless?' she asked. 'You mean, my Carlo, that I am to sit still, and watch, and wait.'

He answered, 'I will tell you this much: I can be struck vitally through you. In the game I am playing, I am able to defend myself. If you enter it, distraction begins. Stay with my mother.'

'Am I to know nothing?'

'Everything—in good time.'

'I might—might I not help you, my Carlo?'

'Yes; and nobly too. And I show you the way.'

Agostino and Carlo made an expedition to Turin. Before he went, Carlo took her in his arms.

'Is it coming?' she said, shutting her eyelids like a child expecting the report of firearms.

He pressed his lips to the closed eyes. 'Not yet; but are you growing timid?'

His voice seemed to reprove her.

She could have told him that keeping her in the dark among unknown terrors ruined her courage; but the minutes were too precious, his touch too sweet. In eyes and hands he had become her lover again. The blissful minutes rolled away like waves that keep the sunshine out at sea.

Her solitude in the villa was beguiled by the arrival of the score of an operatic scena, entitled 'Hagar,' by Rocco Ricci, which she fancied that either Carlo or her dear old

master had sent, and she devoured it. She thought it written expressly for her. With HAGAR she communed during the long hours, and sang herself on to the verge of an imagined desert beyond the mountain-shadowed lake and the last view of her beloved Motterone. Hagar's face of tears in the Brera was known to her; and Hagar in her 'Addio' gave the living voice to that dumb one. Vittoria revelled in the delicious vocal misery. She expanded with the sorrow of poor Hagar, whose tears refreshed her, and parted her from her recent narrowing self-consciousness. The great green mountain fronted her like a living presence. Motterone supplied the place of the robust and venerable patriarch, whom she reproached, and worshipped, but with a fathomless burdensome sense of cruel injustice, deeper than the tears or the voice which spoke of it: a feeling of subjected love that was like a mother's giving suck to a detested child. Countess Ammiani saw the abrupt alteration of her step and look with a dim surprise. 'What do you conceal from me?' she asked, and supplied the answer by charitably attributing it to news that the Signora Piaveni was coming.

When Laura came, the countess thanked her, saying—'I am a wretched companion for this boiling head.'

Laura soon proved to her that she had been the best, for after very few hours Vittoria was looking like the Hagar on the canvas.

A woman such as Violetta d'Isorella was of the sort from which Laura shrank with all her feminine power of loathing; but she spoke of her with some effort at personal tolerance until she heard of Violetta's stipulation for the deferring of Carlo's marriage, and contrived to guess that Carlo was reserved and unfamiliar with his betrothed. Then she cried out, 'Fool that he is! Is it ever possible to come to the end of the folly of men? She

has inflamed his vanity. She met him when you were holding him waiting, and no doubt she commenced with lamentations over the country, followed by a sigh, a fixed look, a cheerful air, and the assurance to him that she *knew* it—uttered as if through the keyhole of the royal cabinet—she knew that Sardinia would break the Salasco armistice in a month:—if only, *if* the king could be sure of support from the youth of Lombardy.'

'Do you suspect the unhappy king?' Vittoria interposed.

'Grasp your colours tight,' said Laura, nodding sarcastic approbation of such fidelity, and smiling slightly. 'There has been no mention of the king. Countess d'Isorella is a spy and a tool of the Jesuits, taking pay from all parties—Austrian as well, I would swear. Their object is to paralyze the march on Rome, and she has won Carlo for them. I am told that Barto Rizzo is another of her conquests. Thus she has a madman and a fool, and what may not be done with a madman and a fool? However, I have set a watch on her. She must have inflamed Carlo's vanity. He has it, just as they all have. There 's trickery: I would rather behold the boy charging at the head of a column than putting faith in this base creature. She must have simulated well,' Laura went on talking to herself.

'What trickery?' said Vittoria.

'He was in love with the woman when he was a lad,' Laura replied, and pertinently to Vittoria's feelings. This threw the moist shade across her features.

Beppo in Turin and Luigi on the lake were the watch set on Countess d'Isorella; they were useless except to fortify Laura's suspicions. The Duchess of Graätli wrote mere gossip from Milan. She mentioned that Anna of Lenkenstein had visited with her the tomb of her brother Count Paul at Bologna, and had returned in double

mourning; and that Madame Sedley—'the sister of our poor ruined Pierson'—had obtained grace, for herself at least, from Anna, by casting herself at Anna's feet, and that they were now friends.

Vittoria felt ashamed of Adela.

When Carlo returned, the signora attacked him boldly with all her weapons; reproached him; said, 'Would my husband have treated me in such a manner?' Carlo twisted his moustache and stroked his young beard for patience. They passed from room to balcony and terrace, and Laura brought him back into company without cessation of her fire of questions and sarcasms, saying, 'No, no; we will speak of these things publicly.' She appealed alternately to Agostino, Vittoria, and Countess Ammiani for support, and as she certainly spoke sense, Carlo was reduced to gloom and silence. Laura then paused. 'Surely you have punished your bride enough?' she said; and more softly, 'Brother of my Giacomo! you are under an evil spell.'

Carlo started up in anger. Bending to Vittoria, he offered her his hand to lead her out. They went together.

'A good sign,' said the countess.

'A bad sign!' Laura sighed. 'If he had taken *me* out for explanation! But tell me, my Agostino, are you the woman's dupe?'

'I have been,' Agostino admitted frankly.

'You did really put faith in her?'

'She condescends to be so excessively charming.'

'You could not advance a better reason.'

'It is one of our best; perhaps our very best, where your sex is concerned, signora.'

'You are her dupe no more?'

'No more. Oh, dear no!'

'You understand her now, do you?'

'For the very reason, signora, that I have been her dupe. That is, I am beginning to understand her. I am not yet in possession of the key.'

'Not yet in possession!' said Laura contemptuously; 'but, never mind. Now for Carlo.'

'Now for Carlo. He declares that he never has been deceived by her.'

'He is perilously vain,' sighed the signora.

'Seriously'—Agostino drew out the length of his beard —'I do not suppose that he has been—boys, you know, are so acute. He fancies he can make her of service, and he shows some skill.'

'The skill of a fish to get into the net!'

'My dearest signora, you do not allow for the times. I remember'—Agostino peered upward through his eyelashes in a way that he had—'I remember seeing in a meadow a gossamer running away with a spider-thread. It was against all calculation. But, observe: there were exterior agencies at work: a stout wind blew. The ordinary reckoning is based on calms. Without the operation of disturbing elements, the spider-thread would have gently detained the gossamer.'

'Is that meant for my son?' Countess Ammiani asked slowly, with incredulous emphasis.

Agostino and Laura, laughing in their hearts at the mother's mysterious veneration for Carlo, had to explain that 'gossamer' was a poetic, generic term, to embrace the lighter qualities of masculine youth.

A woman's figure passed swiftly by the window, which led Laura to suppose that the couple outside had parted. She ran forth, calling to one of them, but they came hand in hand, declaring that they had seen neither woman nor man. 'And I am happy,' Vittoria whispered. She looked happy, pale though she was.

'It is only my dreadful longing for rest which makes me

pale, she said to Laura, when they were alone. 'Carlo has proved to me that he is wiser than I am.'

'A proof that you love Carlo, perhaps,' Laura rejoined.

'Dearest, he speaks more gently of the king.'

'It may be cunning, or it may be carelessness.'

'Will nothing satisfy you, wilful sceptic? He is quite alive to the Countess d'Isorella's character. He told me how she dazzled him once.'

'Not how she has entangled him now?'

'It is not true. He told me what I should like to dream over without talking any more to anybody. Ah, what a delight! to have known him, as you did, when he was a boy. Can one who knew him then mean harm to him? I am not capable of imagining it. No; he will not abandon poor broken Lombardy, and he is right; and it is my duty to sit and wait. No shadow shall come between us. He has said it, and I have said it. We have but one thing to fear, which is contemptible to fear; so I am at peace.'

'Love-sick,' was Laura's mental comment. Yet when Carlo explained his position to her next day, she was milder in her condemnation of him, and even admitted that a man must be guided by such brains as he possesses. He had conceived that his mother had a right to claim one month from him at the close of the war; he said this reddening. Laura nodded. He confessed that he was irritated when he met the Countess d'Isorella, with whom, to his astonishment, he found Barto Rizzo. She had picked him up, weak from a paroxysm, on the high-road to Milan. 'And she tamed the brute,' said Carlo, in admiration of her ability; 'she saw that he was *plot-mad*, and she set him at work on a stupendous plot; agents running nowhere, and scribblings concentering in her work-basket. You smile at me, as if I were a similar patient, signora. But I am my own agent. I have personally

seen all my men in Turin and elsewhere. Violetta has not one grain of love for her country; but she can be made to serve it. As for me, I have gone too far to think of turning aside and drilling with Luciano. He may yet be diverted from Rome, to strike another blow for Lombardy. The Chief, I know, has some religious sentiment about Rome. So might I have; it is the Head of Italy. Let us raise the body first. And we have been beaten here. Great Gods! we will have another fight for it on the same spot, and quickly. Besides, I cannot face Luciano and tell him why I was away from him in the dark hour. How can I tell him that I was lingering to bear a bride to the altar? while he and the rest—poor fellows! Hard enough to have to mention it to you, signora!'

She understood his boyish sense of shame. Making smooth allowances for a feeling natural to his youth and the circumstances, she said, 'I am your sister, for you were my husband's brother-in-arms, Carlo. We two speak heart to heart: I sometimes fancy you have that voice: you hurt me with it more than you know; gladden me too! My Carlo, I wish to hear why Countess d'Isorella objects to your marriage.'

'She does not object.'

'An answer that begins by quibbling is not propitious. She opposes it.'

'For this reason: you have not forgotten the bronze butterfly?'

'I see more clearly,' said Laura, with a start.

'There appears to be no cure for the brute's mad suspicion of her,' Carlo pursued: 'and he is powerful among the Milanese. If my darling takes my name, he can damage much of my influence, and—you know what there is to be dreaded from a fanatic.'

Laura nodded, as if in full agreement with him, and

said, after meditating a minute, 'What sort of a lover is this!' She added a little laugh to the singular interjection.

'Yes, I have also thought of a secret marriage,' said Carlo, stung by her penetrating instinct so that he was enabled to read the meaning in her mind.

'The best way, when you are afflicted by a dilemma of such a character, my Carlo,' the signora looked at him, 'is to take a chess-table and make your moves on it. "King—my duty"; "queen—my passion"; "bishop—my social obligation"; "knight—my what-you-will and my round-the-corner wishes." Then, if you find that queen may be gratified without endangering king, and so forth, why, you may follow your inclinations; and if not, not. My Carlo, you are either enviably cool, or you are an enviable hypocrite.'

'The matter is not quite so easily settled as that,' said Carlo.

On the whole, though against her preconception, Laura thought him an honest lover, and not the player of a double game. She saw that Vittoria should have been with him in the critical hour of defeat, when his passions were down, and heaven knows what weakness of our common manhood, that was partly pride, partly love-craving, made his nature waxen to every impression; a season, as Laura knew, when the mistress of a loyal lover should not withhold herself from him. A nature tender like Carlo's, and he bearing an enamoured heart, could not, as Luciano Romara had done, pass instantly from defeat to drill. And vain as Carlo was (the vanity being most intricate and subtle, like a nervous fluid), he was very open to the belief that he could diplomatize as well as fight, and lead a movement yet better than follow it. Even so the signora tried to read his case.

They were all, excepting Countess Ammiani ('who will

never, I fear, do me this honour,' Violetta wrote, and the countess said, 'Never,' and quoted a proverb), about to pass three or four days at the villa of Countess d'Isorella. Before they set out, Vittoria received a portentous envelope containing a long scroll, that was headed 'Your Crimes,' and detailing a list of her offences against the country, from the revelation of the plot in her first letter to Wilfrid, to services rendered to the enemy during the war, up to the departure of Charles Albert out of forsaken Milan.

'B. R.' was the undisguised signature at the end of the scroll.

Things of this description restored her old war-spirit to Vittoria. She handed the scroll to Laura; Laura, in great alarm, passed it on to Carlo. He sent for Angelo Guidascarpi in haste, for Carlo read it as an ante-dated justificatory document to some mischievous design, and he desired that hands as sure as his own, and yet more vigilant eyes, should keep watch over his betrothed.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

VIOLETTA D'ISORELLA

The villa inhabited by Countess d'Isorella was on the water's edge, within clear view of the projecting Villa Ricciardi, in that darkly-wooded region of the lake which leads up to the Italian-Swiss canton.

Violetta received here an envoy from Anna of Lenkenstein, direct out of Milan: an English lady, calling herself Mrs. Sedley, and a particular friend of Countess Anna. At the first glance Violetta saw that her visitor had the pretension to match her arts against her own; so, to

sound her thoroughly, she offered her the hospitalities of the villa for a day or more. The invitation was accepted. Much to Violetta's astonishment, the lady betrayed no anxiety to state the exact terms of her mission: she appeared, on the contrary, to have an unbounded satisfaction in the society of her hostess, and prattled of herself and Antonio-Pericles, and her old affection for Vittoria, with the wiliest simplicity, only requiring to be assured at times that she spoke intelligible Italian and exquisite French. Violetta supposed her to feel that she commanded the situation. Patient study of this woman revealed to Violetta the amazing fact that she was dealing with a born bourgeoise, who, not devoid of petty acuteness, was unaffectedly enjoying her noble small-talk, and the prospect of a footing in Italian high society. Violetta smiled at the comedy she had been playing in, scarcely reproaching herself for not having imagined it. She proceeded to the point of business without further delay.

Adela Sedley had nothing but a verbal message to deliver. The Countess Anna of Lenkenstein offered, on her word of honour as a noblewoman, to make over the quarter of her estate and patrimony to the Countess d'Isorella, if the latter should succeed in thwarting—something.

Forced to speak plainly, Adela confessed she thought she knew the nature of that something.

To preclude its being named, Violetta then diverged from the subject.

'We will go round to your friend the Signor Antonio-Pericles at Villa Ricciardi,' she said. 'You will see that he treats me familiarly, but he is not a lover of mine. I suspect your "something" has something to do with the Jesuits.'

Adela Sedley replied to the penultimate sentence: 'It

would not surprise me, indeed, to hear of any number of adorers.'

'I have the usual retinue, possibly,' said Violetta.

'Dear countess, I could be one of them myself!' Adela burst out with tentative boldness.

'Then, kiss me.'

And behold, they interchanged that unsweet feminine performance.

Adela's lips were unlocked by it.

'How many would envy me, dear Countess d'Isorella!'

She really conceived that she was driving into Violetta's heart by the great high road of feminine vanity. Violetta permitted her to think as she liked.

'Your countrywomen, madame, do not make large allowances for beauty, I hear.'

'None at all. But they are so stiff! so frigid! I know one, a Miss Ford, now in Italy, who would not let me have a male friend, and a character, in conjunction.'

'You are acquainted with Count Karl Lenkenstein?'

Adela blushingly acknowledged it.

'The whisper goes that I was once admired by him,' said Violetta.

'And by Count Ammiani.'

'By count? by milord? by prince? by king?'

'By all who have good taste.'

'Was it jealousy, then, that made Countess Anna hate me?'

'She could not—or she cannot now.'

'Because I have not taken possession of her brother.'

'I could not—may I say it?—I could not understand his infatuation until Countess Anna showed me the portrait of Italy's most beautiful living woman. She told me to look at the last of the Borgia family.'

Violetta laughed out clear music. 'And now you see her?'

'She said that it had saved her brother's life. It has a star and a scratch on the left cheek from a dagger. He wore it on his heart, and an assassin struck him there: a true romance. Countess Anna said to me that it had saved one brother, and that it should help to avenge the other. She has not spoken to me of Jesuits.'

'Nothing at all of the Jesuits?' said Violetta carelessly. 'Perhaps she wishes to use my endeavours to get the Salasco armistice prolonged, and tempts me, knowing I am a prodigal. Austria is victorious, you know, but she wants peace. Is that the case? I do not press you to answer.'

Adela replied hesitatingly: 'Are you aware, countess, whether there is any truth in the report that Countess Lena has a passion for Count Ammiani?'

'Ah, then,' said Violetta, 'Countess Lena's sister would naturally wish to prevent his contemplated marriage! We may have read the riddle at last. Are you discreet? If you are, you will let it be known that I had the honour of becoming intimate with you in Turin—say, at the Court. We shall meet frequently there during winter, I trust, if you care to make a comparison of the Italian with the Austrian and the English nobility.'

An eloquent 'Oh!' escaped from Adela's bosom. She had certainly not expected to win her way with this estimable Italian titled lady thus rapidly. Violetta had managed her so well that she was no longer sure whether she did know the exact nature of her mission, the words of which she had faithfully transmitted as having been alone confided to her. It was with chagrin that she saw Pericles put his forefinger on a salient dimple of the countess's cheek when he welcomed them. He puffed and blew like one working simultaneously at bugle and big drum on hearing an allusion to Vittoria. The mention

of the name of that abominable traitress was interdicted at Villa Ricciardi, he said; she had dragged him at two armies' tails to find his right senses at last: Pericles was cured of his passion for her at last. He had been mad, but he was cured—and so forth, in the old strain. His preparations for a private operatic performance diverted him from these fierce incriminations, and he tripped busily from spot to spot, conducting the ladies over the tumbled lower floors of the spacious villa, and calling their admiration on the desolation of the scene. Then they went up to the maestro's room. Pericles became deeply considerate for the master's privacy. 'He is my slave; the man has ruined himself for la Vittoria; but I respect the impersonation of art,' he said under his breath to the ladies as they stood at the door; 'hark!' The piano was touched, and the voice of Irma di Karski broke out in a shrill crescendo. Rocco Ricci within gave tongue to the vehement damnatory dance of Pericles outside. Rocco struck his piano again encouragingly for a second attempt, but Irma was sobbing. She was heard to say: 'This is the fifteenth time you have pulled me down in one morning. You hate me; you do; you hate me.' Rocco ran his fingers across the keys, and again struck the octave for Irma. Pericles wiped his forehead, when, impenitent and unteachable, she took the notes in the manner of a cock. He thumped at the door violently and entered.

'Excellent! horrid! brava! abominable! beautiful! My Irma, you have reached the skies. You ascend like a firework, and crown yourself at the top. No more to-day; but descend at your leisure, my dear, and we will try to mount again by-and-by, and not so fast, if you please. Ha! your voice is a racehorse. You will learn to ride him with temper and judgement, and you will go. Not so, my Rocco? Irma, you want repose, my dear.

One thing I guarantee to you—you will please the public. It is a minor thing that you should please me.'

Countess d'Isorella led Irma away, and had to bear with many fits of weeping, and to assent to the force of all the charges of vindictive conspiracy and inveterate malice with which the jealous creature assailed Vittoria's name. The countess then claimed her ear for half-a-minute.

'Have you had any news of Countess Anna lately?'

Irma had not; she admitted it despondently. 'There is such a vile conspiracy against me in Italy—and Italy is a poor singer's fame—that I should be tempted to do anything. And I detest la Vittoria. She has such a hold on this Antonio-Pericles, I don't see how I can hurt her, unless I meet her and fly at her throat.'

'You naturally detest her,' said the countess. 'Repeat Countess Anna's proposal to you.'

'It was insulting—she offered me money.'

'That you should persuade *me* to assist you in preventing la Vittoria's marriage to Count Ammiani?'

'Dear lady, you know I did not try to persuade you.'

'You knew that you would not succeed, my Irma. But Count Ammiani will not marry her; so you will have a right to claim some reward. I do not think that la Vittoria is quite idle. Look out for yourself, my child. If you take to plotting, remember it is a game of two.'

'If she thwarts me in one single step, I will let loose that madman on her,' said Irma, trembling.

'You mean the Signor Antonio-Pericles?'

'No; I mean that furious man I saw at your villa, dear countess.'

'Ah! Barto Rizzo. A very furious man. He bellowed when he heard her name, I remember. You must not do it. But, for Count Ammiani's sake, I desire to see his marriage postponed, at least.'

'Where is she?' Irma inquired.

The countess shrugged. 'Even though I knew, I could not prudently tell you in your present excited state.'

She went to Pericles for a loan of money. Pericles remarked that there was not much of it in Turin. 'But, countess, you whirl the gold-pieces like dust from your wheels; and a spy, my good soul, a lovely secret emissary, she will be getting underpaid if she allows herself to want money. There is your beauty; it is ripe, but it is fresh, and it is extraordinary. Yes; there is your beauty.' Before she could obtain a promise of the money, Violetta had to submit to be stripped to her character, which was hard; but on the other hand, Pericles exacted no interest on his money, and it was not often that he exacted a return of it in coin. Under these circumstances, ladies in need of money can find it in their hearts to pardon mere brutality of phrase. Pericles promised to send it to the countess on one condition; which condition he cancelled, saying dejectedly, 'I do not care to know where she is. I will not know.'

'She has the score of *Hagar*, wherever she is,' said Violetta, 'and when she hears that you have done the scena without her aid, you will have stuck a dagger in her bosom.'

'Not,' Pericles cried in despair, 'not if she should hear Irma's Hagar! To the desert with Irma. It is the place for a crab-apple. Bravo, Abraham! you were wise.'

Pericles added that Montini was hourly expected, and that there was to be a rehearsal in the evening.

When she had driven home, Violetta found Barto Rizzo's accusatory paper laid on her writing-desk. She gathered the contents in a careless glance, and walked into the garden alone, to look for Carlo.

He was leaning on the balustrade of the terrace, near the water-gate, looking into the deep clear lake-water. Violetta placed herself beside him without a greeting.

'You are watching fish for coolness, my Carlo?'

'Yes,' he said, and did not turn to her face.

'You were very angry when you arrived?'

She waited for his reply.

'Why do you not speak, Carlino?'

'I am watching fish for coolness,' he said.

'Meantime,' said Violetta, 'I am scorched.'

He looked up, and led her to an arch of shade, where he sat quite silent.

'Can anything be more vexing than this?' she was reduced to exclaim.

'Ah!' said he, 'you would like the catalogue to be written out for you in a big bold hand, possibly, with terrific initials at the end of the page.'

'Carlo, you have done worse than that. When I saw you first here, what crimes did you not accuse me of? what names did you not scatter on my head? and what things did I not confess to? I bore the unkindness, for you were beaten, and you wanted a victim. And, my dear friend, considering that I am after all a woman, my forbearance has subsequently been still greater.'

'How?' he asked. Her half-pathetic candour melted him.

'You must have a lively memory for the uses of forgetfulness, Carlo. When you had scourged me well, you thought it proper to raise me up and give me comfort. I was wicked for serving the king, and therefore the country, as a spy; but I was to persevere, and cancel my iniquities by betraying those whom I served to you. That was your instructive precept. Have I done it or not? Answer, too—have I done it for any payment beyond your approbation? I persuaded you to hope for Lombardy, and without any vaunting of my own patriotism. You have seen and spoken to the men I directed you to visit. If their heads master yours, I

shall be reprobated for it, I know surely; but I am confident as yet that you can match them. In another month I expect to see the king over the Ticino once more, and Carlo in Brescia with his comrades. You try to penetrate my eyes. That 's foolish; I can make them glass. Read me by what I say and what I do. I do not entreat you to trust *me*; I merely beg that you will trust your own judgement of me by what I have helped you to do hitherto. You and I, my dear boy, have had some trifling together. Admit that another woman would have refused to surrender you as I did when your unruly Vittoria was at last induced to come to you from Milan. Or, another woman would have had her revenge on discovering that she had been a puppet of soft eyes and a lover's quarrel with his mistress. Instead of which, I let you go. I am opposed to the marriage, it 's true; and you know why.'

Carlo had listened to Violetta, measuring the false and the true in this recapitulation of her conduct with cool accuracy until she alluded to their personal relations. Thereat his brows darkened.

'We had "some trifling together,"' he said musingly.

'Is it going to be denied in these sweeter days?' Violetta reddened.

'The phrase is elastic. Suppose my bride were to hear it?'

'It was addressed to your ears, Carlo.'

'It cuts two ways. Will you tell me when it was that I last had the happiness of saluting you, lip to lip?'

'In Brescia—before I had espoused an imbecile—two nights before my marriage—near the fountain of the Greek girl with a pitcher.'

Pride and anger nerved the reply. It was uttered in a rapid low breath. Coming altogether unexpectedly, it created an intense momentary revulsion of his feelings by

conjuring up his boyish love in a scene more living than the sunlight.

He lifted her hand to his mouth. He was Italian enough, though a lover, to feel that she deserved more. She had reddened deliciously, and therewith hung a dewy rosy moisture on her underlids. Raising her eyes, she looked like a cut orange to a thirsty lip. He kissed her, saying, 'Pardon.'

'Keep it secret, you mean?' she retorted. 'Yes, I pardon that wish of yours. I can pardon much to my beauty.'

She stood up as majestically as she had spoken.

'You know, my Violetta, that I am madly in love.'

'I have learnt it.'

'You know it:—what else would . . .? If I were not lost in love, could I see you as I do and let Brescia be the final chapter?'

Violetta sighed. 'I should have preferred its being so rather than this superfluous additional line to announce an end, like a foolish staff on the edge of a cliff. You thought that you were saluting a leper, or a saint?'

'Neither. If ever we can talk together again, as we have done,' Carlo said gloomily, 'I will tell you what I think of myself.'

'No, but Richelieu might have behaved . . . Ah! perhaps not quite in the same way,' she corrected her flowing apology for him. 'But then, he was a Frenchman. He could be flighty without losing his head. Dear Italian Carlo! Yes, in the teeth of Barto Rizzo, and *for the sake of* the country, marry her at once. It will be the best thing for you; really the best. You want to know from me the whereabout of Barto Rizzo. He may be in the mountain over Stresa, or in Milan. He also has thrown off my yoke, such as it was! I do assure you, Carlo, I have no command over him: but,

mind, I half dote on the wretch. No man made me desperately in love with myself before he saw me, when I stopped his raving in the middle of the road with one look of my face. There was foam on his beard and round his eyes; the poor wretch took out his handkerchief, and he sobbed. I don't know how many luckless creatures he had killed on his way; but when I took him into my carriage—king, emperor, orator on stilts, minister of police—not one has flattered me as he did, by just gazing at me. Beauty can do as much as music, my Carlo.'

Carlo thanked heaven that Violetta had no passion in her nature. She had none: merely a leaning toward evil, a light sense of shame, a desire for money, and in her heart a contempt for the principles she did not possess, but which, apart from the intervention of other influences, could occasionally sway her actions. Friendship, or rather the shadowy recovery of a past attachment that had been more than friendship, inclined her now and then to serve a master who failed distinctly to represent her interests; and when she met Carlo after the close of the war, she had really set to work in hearty kindliness to rescue him from what she termed 'shipwreck with that disastrous Republican crew.' He had obtained greater ascendency over her than she liked; yet she would have forgiven it, as well as her consequent slight deviation from direct allegiance to her masters in various cities, but for Carlo's commanding personal coolness. She who had tamed a madman by her beauty, was outraged, and not unnaturally, by the indifference of a former lover.

Later in the day, Laura and Vittoria, with Agostino, reached the villa; and Adela put her lips to Vittoria's ear, whispering: 'Naughty! when are you to lose your liberty to turn men's heads?' and then she heaved a sigh with Wilfrid's name. She had formed the acquaintance

of Countess d'Isorella in Turin, she said, and satisfactorily repeated her lesson, but with a blush. She was little more than a shade to Vittoria, who wondered what she had to live for. After the early evening dinner, when sunlight and the colours of the sun were beyond the western mountains, they pushed out on the lake. A moon was overhead, seeming to drop lower on them as she filled with light.

Agostino and Vittoria fell upon their theme of discord, as usual—the King of Sardinia.

'We near the vesper hour, my daughter,' said Agostino; 'you would provoke me to argumentation in heaven itself. I am for peace. I remember looking down on two cats with arched backs in the solitary arena of the Verona amphitheatre. We men, my Carlo, will not, in the decay of time, so conduct ourselves.'

Vittoria looked on Laura and thought of the cannon-sounding hours, whose echoes rolled over their slaughtered hope. The sun fell, the moon shone, and the sun would rise again, but Italy lay face to earth. They had seen her together before the enemy. That recollection was a joy that stood, though the winds beat at it, and the torrents. She loved her friend's worn eyelids and softly-shut mouth;—the after-glow of battle seemed on them; the silence of the field of carnage under heaven;—and the patient turning of Laura's eyes this way and that to speakers upon common things, covered the despair of her heart as with a soldier's cloak.

Laura met the tender study of Vittoria's look, and smiled.

They neared the Villa Ricciardi, and heard singing. The villa was lighted profusely, so that it made a little mock-sunset on the lake.

'Irma!' said Vittoria, astonished at the ring of a well-known voice that shot up in firework fashion, as Pericles

had said of it. Incredulous, she listened till she was sure; and then glanced hurried questions at all eyes. Violetta laughed, saying, 'You have the score of Rocco Ricci's *Hagar*.'

The boat drew under the blazing windows, and half guessing, half hearing, Vittoria understood that Pericles was giving an entertainment here, and had abjured her. She was not insensible to the slight. This feeling, joined to her long unsatisfied craving to sing, led her to be intolerant of Irma's style, and visibly vexed her.

Violetta whispered: 'He declares that your voice is cracked: show him! Burst out with the "Addio" of Hagar. May she not, Carlo? Don't you permit the poor soul to sing? She cannot contain herself.'

Carlo, Adela, Agostino, and Violetta prompted her, and, catching a pause in the villa, she sang the opening notes of Hagar's 'Addio' with her old glorious fulness of tone and perfect utterance.

The first who called her name was Rocco Ricci, but Pericles was the first to rush out and hang over the boat. 'Witch! traitress! infernal ghost! heart of ice!' and in English 'humbug!' and in French 'coquine!':—these were a few of the titles he poured on her. Rocco Ricci and Montini kissed hands to her, begging her to come to them. She was very willing outwardly, and in her heart most eager; but Carlo bade the rowers push off. Then it was pitiful to hear the shout of abject supplication from Pericles. He implored Count Ammiani's pardon, Vittoria's pardon, for telling her what she was; and as the boat drew farther away, he offered her sums of money to enter the villa and sing the score of *Hagar*. He offered to bear the blame of her bad behaviour to him, said he would forget it and stamp it out; that he would pay for the provisioning of a regiment of volunteers for a whole month; that he would present

her marriage trousseau to her—yea, and let her marry. 'Sandra! my dear! my dear!' he cried, and stretched over the parapet speechless, like a puppet slain.

So strongly did she comprehend the sincerity of his passion for her voice that she could or would see nothing extravagant in this demonstration, which excited unrestrained laughter in every key from her companions in the boat. When the boat was about a hundred yards from the shore, and in full moonlight, she sang the great 'Addio' of Hagar. At the close of it, she had to feel for her lover's hand blindly. No one spoke, either at the Villa Ricciardi, or about her. Her voice possessed the mountain-shadowed lake.

The rowers pulled lustily home through chill air.

Luigi and Beppo were at the villa, both charged with news from Milan. Beppo claiming the right to speak first, which Luigi granted with a magnificent sweep of his hand, related that Captain Weisspriess, of the garrison, had wounded Count Medole in a duel severely. He brought a letter to Vittoria from Merthyr, in which Merthyr urged her to prevent Count Ammiani's visiting Milan for any purpose whatever, and said that he was coming to be present at her marriage. She was reading this while Luigi delivered his burden; which was, that in a subsequent duel, the slaughtering captain had killed little Leone Rufo, the gay and gallant boy, Carlo's comrade, and her friend.

Luigi laughed scornfully at his rival, and had edged away out of sight before he could be asked who had sent him. Beppo ignominiously confessed that he had not heard of this second duel. At midnight he was on horseback, bound for Milan, with a challenge to the captain from Carlo, who had a jealous fear that Luciano at Vercelli might have outstripped him. Carlo requested the captain to guarantee him an hour's immunity in the

city on a stated day, or to name any spot on the borders of Piedmont for the meeting. The challenge was sent with Countess Ammiani's approbation and Laura's. Vittoria submitted.

That done, Carlo gave up his heart to his bride. A fight in prospect was the hope of wholesome work after his late indecision and double play. They laughed at themselves, accused hotly, and humbly excused themselves, praying for mutual pardon.

She had behaved badly in disobeying his mandate from Brescia.

Yes, but had he not been over-imperious?

True; still she should have remembered her promise in the Vicentino.

She did indeed; but how could she quit her wounded friend Merthyr?

Perhaps not: then, why had she sent word to him from Milan that she would be at Pallanza?

This question knocked at a sealed chamber. She was silent, and Carlo had to brood over something as well. He gave her hints of his foolish pique, his wrath and bitter baffled desire for her when, coming to Pallanza, he came to an empty house. But he could not help her to see, for he did not himself feel, that he had been spurred by silly passions, pique, and wrath, to plunge instantly into new political intrigue; and that some of his worst faults had become mixed up with his devotion to his country. Had he taken Violetta for an ally in all purity of heart? The kiss he had laid on the woman's sweet lips had shaken his absolute belief in that. He tried to set his brain travelling backward, in order to contemplate accurately the point of his original weakness. It being almost too severe a task for any young head, Carlo deemed it sufficient that he should say—and this he felt—that he was unworthy of his beloved.

Could Vittoria listen to such stuff? She might have kissed him to stop the flow of it, but kissings were rare between them; so rare, that when they had put mouth to mouth, a little quivering spire of flame, dim at the base, stood to mark the spot in their memories. She moved her hand, as to throw aside such talk. Unfretful in blood, chaste and keen, she at least knew the foolishness of the common form of lovers trifling when there is a burning love to keep under, and Carlo saw that she did, and adored her for this highest proof of the passion of her love.

'In three days you will be mine, if I do not hear from Milan? within five, if I do?' he said.

Vittoria gave him the whole beauty of her face a divine minute, and bowed it assenting. Carlo then led her to his mother, before whom he embraced her for the comfort of his mother's heart. They decided that there should be no whisper of the marriage until the couple were one. Vittoria obtained the countess's permission to write for Merthyr to attend her at the altar. She had seen Weisspriess fall in combat, and she had perfect faith in her lover's right hand.

CHAPTER XXXIX

ANNA OF LENKENSTEIN

Captain Weisspriess replied to Carlo Ammiani promptly, naming Camerlata by Como, as the place where he would meet him.

He stated at the end of some temperate formal lines, that he had given Count Ammiani the preference over half-a-dozen competitors for the honour of measuring

swords with him; but that his adversary must not expect him to be always ready to instruct the young gentlemen of the Lombardo-Venetian province in the arts of fence; and therefore he begged to observe, that his encounter with Count Ammiani would be the last occasion upon which he should hold himself bound to accept a challenge from Count Ammiani's countrymen.

It was quite possible, the captain said, drawing a familiar illustration from the gaming-table, to break the stoutest Bank in the world by a perpetual multiplication of your bets, and he was modest enough to remember that he was but one man against some thousands, to contend with all of whom would be exhausting.

Consequently the captain desired Count Ammiani to proclaim to his countrymen that the series of challenges must terminate; and he requested him to advertise the same in a Milanese, a Turin, and a Neapolitan journal.

'I am not a butcher,' he concluded. 'The task you inflict upon me is scarcely bearable. Call it by what name you will, it is having ten shots to one, which was generally considered an equivalent to murder. My sword is due to you, Count Ammiani; and, as I know you to be an honourable nobleman, I would rather you were fighting in Venice, though your cause is hopeless, than standing up to match yourself against me. Let me add, that I deeply respect the lady who is engaged to be united to you, and would not willingly cross steel either with her lover or her husband. I shall be at Camerlata at the time appointed. If I do not find you there, I shall understand that you have done me the honour to take my humble advice, and have gone where your courage may at least appear to have done better service. I shall sheath my sword and say no more about it.'

All of this, save the concluding paragraph, was written under the eyes of Countess Anna of Lenkenstein.

He carried it to his quarters, where he appended the —as he deemed it—conciliatory passage: after which he handed it to Beppo, in a square of the barracks, with a buona mano that Beppo received bowing, and tossed to an old decorated regimental dog of many wounds and a veteran's gravity. For this offence a Styrian grenadier seized him by the shoulders, lifting him off his feet and swinging him easily, while the dog arose from his contemplation of the coin and swayed an expectant tail. The Styrian had dashed Beppo to earth before Weisspriess could interpose, and the dog had got him by the throat. In the struggle Beppo tore off the dog's medal for distinguished conduct on the field of battle. He restored it as soon as he was free, and won unanimous plaudits from officers and soldiers for his kindly thoughtfulness and the pretty manner with which he dropped on one knee, and assuaged the growls, and attached the medal to the old dog's neck. Weisspriess walked away. Beppo then challenged his Styrian to fight. The case was laid before a couple of sergeants, who shook their heads on hearing his condition to be that of a serving-man. The Styrian was ready to waive considerations of superiority; but the judges pronounced their veto. A soldier in the Imperial Royal service, though he was merely a private in the ranks, could not accept a challenge from civilians below the rank of notary, secretary, hotel- or inn-keeper, and such-like: servants and tradesmen he must seek to punish in some other way; and they also had their appeal to his commanding officer. So went the decision of the military tribunal, until the Styrian, having contrived to make Beppo understand, by the agency of a single Italian verb, that he wanted a blow, Beppo spun about and delivered a stinging smack on the Styrian's cheek; which altered the view of the case, for, under peculiar circumstances—supposing that he did not

choose to cut him down—a soldier might condescend to challenge his civilian inferiors: 'in our regiment,' said the sergeants, meaning that they had relaxed the stringency of their laws.

Beppo met his Styrian outside the city walls, and laid him flat. He declined to fight a second; but it was represented to him, by the aid of an interpreter, that the officers of the garrison were subjected to successive challenges, and that the first trial of his skill might have been nothing finer than luck; and besides, his adversary had a right to call a champion. 'We all do it,' the soldiers assured him. 'Now your blood 's up you 're ready for a dozen of us'; which was less true of a constitution that was quicker in expending its heat. He stood out against a young fellow almost as limber as himself, much taller, and longer in the reach, by whom he was quickly disabled with cuts on thigh and head. Seeing this easy victory over him, the soldiers, previously quite civil, cursed him for having got the better of their fallen comrade, and went off discussing how he had done the trick, leaving him to lie there. A peasant carried him to a small suburban inn, where he remained several days oppressed horribly by a sense that he had forgotten something. When he recollected what it was, he entrusted the captain's letter to his landlady;—a good woman, but she chanced to have a scamp of a husband, who snatched it from her and took it to his market. Beppo supposed the letter to be on its way to Pallanza, when it was in General Schöneck's official desk; and soon after the breath of a scandalous rumour began to circulate.

Captain Weisspriess had gone down to Camerlata accompanied by a Colonel Volpo, of an Austro-Italian regiment, and by Lieutenant Jenna. At Camerlata a spectacled officer, Major Nagen, joined them. Weisspriess was the less pleased with his company on hearing that he

had come to witness the meeting, in obedience to an express command of a person who was interested in it. Jenna was the captain's friend: Volpo was seconding him for the purpose of getting Count Ammiani to listen to reason from the mouth of a countryman. There could be no doubt in the captain's mind that this Major Nagen was Countess Anna's spy as well as his rival, and he tried to be rid of him; but in addition to the shortness of sight which was Nagen's plea for pushing his thin transparent nose into every corner, he enjoyed at will an intermittent deafness, and could hear anything without knowing of it. Brother officers said of Major Nagen that he was occasionally equally senseless in the nose, which had been tweaked without disturbing the repose of his features. He waited half-an-hour on the ground after the appointed time, and then hurried to Milan. Weisspriess waited an hour. Satisfied that Count Ammiani was not coming, he exacted from Volpo and from Jenna their word of honour as Austrian officers that they would forbear to cast any slur on the courage of his adversary, and would be so discreet on the subject as to imply that the duel was a drawn affair. They pledged themselves accordingly. 'There 's Nagen, it 's true,' said Weisspriess, as a man will say and feel that he has done his best to prevent a thing inevitable.

Milan, and some of the journals of Milan, soon had Carlo Ammiani's name up for challenging Weisspriess and failing to keep his appointment. It grew to be discussed as a tremendous event. The captain received fifteen challenges within two days; among these a second one from Luciano Romara, whom he was beginning to have a strong desire to encounter. He repressed it, as quondam drunkards fight off the whisper of their lips for liquor. 'No more blood,' was his constant inward cry. He wanted peace; but as he also wanted Countess Anna of Lenkenstein and her estates, it may possibly be

remarked of him that what he wanted he did not want to pay for.

At this period Wilfrid had resumed the Austrian uniform as a common soldier in the ranks of the Kinsky regiment. General Schöneck had obtained the privilege for him from the Marshal, General Pierson refusing to lift a finger on his behalf. Nevertheless the uncle was not sorry to hear the tale of his nephew's exploits during the campaign, or of the eccentric intrepidity of the white umbrella; and both to please him, and to intercede for Wilfrid, the latter's old comrades recited his deeds as a part of the treasured familiar history of the army in its late arduous struggle.

General Pierson was chiefly anxious to know whether Countess Lena would be willing to give her hand to Wilfrid in the event of his restoration to his antecedent position in the army. He found her extremely excited about Carlo Ammiani, her old playmate, and once her dear friend. She would not speak of Wilfrid at all. To appease the chivalrous little woman, General Pierson hinted that his nephew, being under the protection of General Schöneck, might get some intelligence from that officer. Lena pretended to reject the notion of her coming into communication with Wilfrid for any earthly purpose. She said to herself, however, that her object was pre-eminently unselfish; and as the General pointedly refused to serve her in a matter that concerned an Italian nobleman, she sent directions to Wilfrid to go before General Schöneck the moment he was off duty, and ask his assistance, in her name, to elucidate the mystery of Count Ammiani's behaviour. The answer was a transmission of Captain Weisspriess's letter to Carlo. Lena caused the fact of this letter having missed its way to be circulated in the journals, and then she carried it triumphantly to her sister, saying:—

'There! I knew these reports were a base calumny.'

'Reports, to what effect?' said Anna.

'That Carlo Ammiani had slunk from a combat with your duellist.'

'Oh! I knew that myself,' Anna remarked.

'You were the loudest in proclaiming it.'

'Because I intend to ruin him.'

'Carlo Ammiani? What has he done to you?'

Anna's eyes had fallen on the additional lines of the letter which she had not dictated. She frowned and exclaimed:

'What is this? Does the man play me false? Read those lines, Lena, and tell me, does the man mean to fight in earnest who can dare to write them? He advises Ammiani to go to Venice. It 's treason, if it is not cowardice. And see here—he has the audacity to say that he deeply respects the lady Ammiani is going to marry. Is Ammiani going to marry her? I think not.'

Anna dashed the letter to the floor.

'But I will make use of what 's within my reach,' she said, picking it up.

'Carlo Ammiani will marry her, I presume,' said Lena.

'Not before he has met Captain Weisspriess, who, by the way, has obtained his majority. And, Lena, my dear, write to inform him that we wish to offer him our congratulations. He will be a General officer in good time.'

'Perhaps you forget that Count Ammiani is a perfect swordsman, Anna.'

'Weisspriess remembers it for me, perhaps;—is that your idea, Lena?'

'He might do so profitably. You have thrown him on two swords.'

'Merely to provoke the third. He is invincible. If he were not, where would his use be?'

'Oh, how I loathe revenge!' cried Lena.

'You cannot love!' her sister retorted. 'That woman calling herself Vittoria Campa shall suffer. She has injured and defied me. How was it that she behaved to us at Meran? She is mixed up with assassins; she is insolent—a dark-minded slut; and she catches stupid men. My brother, my country, and this weak Weisspriess, as I saw him lying in the Ultenthal, cry out against her. I have no sleep. I am not revengeful. Say it, say it, all of you! but I am not. I am not unforgiving. I worship justice, and a black deed haunts me. Let the wicked be contrite and wasted in tears, and I think I can pardon them. But I will have them on their knees. I hate that woman Vittoria more than I hate Angelo Guidascarpi. Look, Lena. If both were begging for life to me, I would send him to the gallows and her to her bedchamber; and all because I worship justice, and believe it to be the weapon of the good and pious. You have a baby's heart; so has Karl. He declines to second Weisspriess; he will have nothing to do with duelling; he would behold his sisters mocked in the streets, and pass on. He talks of Paul's death like a priest. Priests are worthy men; a great resource! Give me a priest's lap when I need it. Shall *I* be condemned to go to the priest and leave that woman singing? If I did, I might well say the world 's a snare, a sham, a pitfall, a horror! It 's what I don't think in any degree. It 's what *you* think, though. Yes, whenever you are vexed you think it. So do the priests, and so do all who will not exert themselves to chastise. I, on the contrary, know that the world is not made up of nonsense. Write to Weisspriess immediately; I must have him here in an hour.'

Weisspriess, on visiting the ladies to receive their congratulations, was unprepared for the sight of his letter to Carlo Ammiani, which Anna thrust before him after he

had saluted her, bidding him read it aloud. He perused it in silence. He was beginning to be afraid of his mistress.

'I called you Austria once, for you were always ready,' Anna said, and withdrew from him, that the sting of her words might take effect.

'God knows, I have endeavoured to earn the title in my humble way,' Weisspriess appealed to Lena.

'Yes, Major Weisspriess, you have,' she said. 'Be Austria still, and forbear toward these people as much as you can. To beat them is enough, in my mind. I am rejoiced that you have not met Count Ammiani, for if you had, two friends of mine, equally dear and equally skilful, would have held their lives at one another's mercy.'

'Equally!' said Weisspriess, and pulled out the length of his moustache.

'Equally courageous,' Lena corrected herself. 'I never distrusted Count Ammiani's courage, nor could distrust yours.'

'Equally dear!' Weisspriess tried to direct a concentrated gaze on her.

Lena evaded an answer by speaking of the rumour of Count Ammiani's marriage.

Weisspriess was thinking with all the sagacious penetration of the military mind, that perhaps this sister was trying to tell him that she would be willing to usurp the place of the other in his affections; and if so, why should she not?

'I may cherish the idea that I am dear to you, Countess Lena?'

'When you are formally betrothed to my sister, you will know you are very dear to me, Major Weisspriess.'

'But,' said he, perceiving his error, 'how many persons

am I to call out before she will consent to a formal betrothal?'

Lena was half smiling at the little tentative bit of sentiment she had so easily turned aside. Her advice to him was to refuse to fight, seeing that he had done sufficient for glory and his good name.

He mentioned Major Nagen as a rival.

Upon this she said: 'Hear me one minute. I was in my sister's bed-room on the first night when she knew of your lying wounded in the Ultenthal. She told you just now that she called you Austria. She adores our Austria in you. The thought that you had been vanquished seemed like our Austria vanquished, and she is so strong for Austria that it is really out of her power to fancy you as defeated without suspecting foul play. So when she makes you fight, she thinks you safe. Many are to go down because you have gone down. Do you not see? And now, Major Weisspriess, I need not expose my sister to you any more, I hope, or depreciate Major Nagen for your satisfaction.'

Weisspriess had no other interview with Anna for several days. She shunned him openly. Her carriage moved off when he advanced to meet her at the parade, or review of arms; and she did not scruple to speak in public with Major Nagen, in the manner of those who have begun to speak together in private. The offender received his punishment gracefully, as men will who have been taught that it flatters them. He refused every challenge. From Carlo Ammiani there came not a word.

It would have been a deadly lull to any fiery temperament engaged in plotting to destroy a victim, but Anna had the patience of hatred—that absolute malignity which can measure its exultation rather by the gathering of its power to harm than by striking. She could lay it aside, or sink it to the bottom of her emotions, at will,

when circumstances appeared against it. And she could do this without fretful regrets, without looking to the future. The spirit of her hatred extracted its own nourishment from things, like an organized creature. When foiled she became passive, and she enjoyed—forced herself compliantly to enjoy—her redoubled energy of hatred voluptuously, if ever a turn in events made wreck of her scheming. She hated Vittoria for many reasons, all of them vague within her bosom because the source of them was indefinite and lay in the fact of her having come into collision with an opposing nature, whose rivalry was no visible rivalry, whose triumph was an ignorance of scorn—a woman who attracted all men, who scattered injuries with insolent artlessness, who never appealed to forgiveness, and was a low-born woman daring to be proud. By repute Anna was implacable, but she had, and knew she had, the capacity for magnanimity of a certain kind; and her knowledge of the existence of this unsuspected fund within her, justified in some degree her reckless efforts to pull her enemy down on her knees. It seemed doubly right that she should force Vittoria to penitence, as being good for the woman, and an end that exonerated her own private sins committed to effect it.

Yet she did not look clearly forward to the day of Vittoria's imploring for mercy. She had too many vexations to endure: she was an insufficient schemer, and was too frequently thwarted to enjoy that ulterior prospect. Her only servile instruments were Major Nagen, and Irma, who came to her from the Villa Ricciardi, hot to do her rival any deadly injury; but though willing to attempt much, these were apparently able to perform little more than the menial work of vengeance. Major Nagen wrote in the name of Weiss-priess to Count Ammiani, appointing a second meeting

at Como, and stating that he would be at the villa of the Duchess of Graätli there. Weisspriess was unsuspectingly taken down to the place by Anna and Lena. There was a gathering of such guests as the duchess alone among her countrywomen could assemble, under the patronage of the conciliatory Government, and the duchess projected to give a series of brilliant entertainments in the saloons of the Union, as she named her house-roof. Count Serabiglione arrived, as did numerous Moderates and priest-party men, Milanese garrison officers and others. Laura Piaveni travelled with Countess d'Isorella and the happy Adela Sedley, from Lago Maggiore.

Laura came, as she cruelly told her friend, for the purpose of making Vittoria's excuses to the duchess. '*Why* can she not come herself?' Amalia persisted in asking, and began to be afflicted with womanly curiosity. Laura would do nothing but shrug and smile, and repeat her message. A little after sunset, when the saloons were lighted, Weisspriess, sitting by his Countess Anna's side, had a slip of paper placed in his hands by one of the domestics. He quitted his post frowning with astonishment, and muttered once, '*My* appointment!' Laura noticed that Anna's heavy eyelids lifted to shoot an expressive glance at Violetta d'Isorella. She said: 'Can that have been anything hostile, do you suppose?' and glanced slyly at her friend.

'No, no,' said Amalia; 'the misunderstanding is explained, and Major Weisspriess is just as ready as Count Ammiani to listen to reason. Besides, Count Ammiani is not so unfriendly but that if he came so near he would come up to me, surely.'

Laura brought Amalia's observation to bear upon Anna and Violetta by turning pointedly from one to the other as she said: 'As for reason, perhaps you have chosen

the word. If Count Ammiani attended an appointment this time, he would be unreasonable.'

A startled 'Why?' leaped from Anna's lips. She reddened at her impulsive clumsiness.

Laura raised her shoulders slightly: 'Do you not know?' The expression of her face reproved Violetta, as for remissness in transmitting secret intelligence. '*You* can answer why, countess,' she addressed the latter, eager to exercise her native love of conflict with this doubtfully-faithful countrywoman;—the Austrian could feel that she had beaten her on the essential point, and afford to give her any number of dialectical victories.

'I really cannot answer why,' Violetta said; 'unless Count Ammiani is, as I venture to hope, better employed.'

'But the answer is charming and perfect,' said Laura.

'Enigmatical answers are declared to be so when they come from us women,' the duchess remarked; 'but then, I fancy, women must not be the hearers, or they will confess that they are just as much bewildered and irritated as I am. Do speak out, my dearest. How is he better employed?'

Laura passed her eyes around the group of ladies. 'If any hero of yours had won the woman he loves, he would be right in thinking it folly to be bound by the invitation to fight, or feast, or what you will, within a space of three months or so; do you not agree with me?'

The different emotions on many visages made the scene curious.

'Count Ammiani has married her!' exclaimed the duchess.

'My old friend Carlo is really married!' said Lena.

Anna stared at Violetta.

The duchess, recovering from her wonder, confirmed the news by saying that she now knew why M. Powys had left Milan in haste, three or four days previously, as she was

aware that the bride had always wished him to be present at the ceremony of her marriage.

'Signora, may I ask you, were you present?' Violetta addressed Laura.

'I will answer most honestly that I was not,' said Laura.

'The marriage was a secret one, perhaps?'

'Even for friends, you see.'

'Necessarily, no doubt,' Lena said, with an idea of easing her sister's stupefaction by a sarcasm foreign to her sentiments.

Adela Sedley, later in exactly comprehending what had been spoken, glanced about for some one who would not be unsympathetic to her exclamation, and suddenly beheld her brother entering the room with Weisspriess. 'Wilfrid! Wilfrid! do you know she is married?'

'So they tell me,' Wilfrid replied, while making his bow to the duchess. He was much broken in appearance, but wore his usual collected manner. Who had told him of the marriage? A person downstairs, he said; not Count Ammiani; not Signor Balderini; no one whom he saw present, no one whom he knew.

'A very mysterious person,' said the duchess.

'Then it 's true after all,' cried Laura. 'I did but guess it.' She assured Violetta that she had only guessed it.

'Does Major Weisspriess know it to be true?' The question came from Anna.

Weisspriess coolly verified it, on the faith of a common servant's communication.

The ladies could see that some fresh piece of mystery lay between him and Wilfrid.

'With whom have you had an interview, and what have you heard?' asked Lena, vexed by Wilfrid's pallid cheeks.

Both men stammered and protested, out of conceit, and were as foolish as men are when pushed to play at mutual concealment.

The duchess's chasseur, Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz, stepped up to his mistress, and whispered discreetly. She gazed straight at Laura. After hesitation she shook her head, and the chasseur retired. Amalia then came to the rescue of the unhappy military wits that were standing a cross-fire of sturdy interrogation.

'Do you not perceive what it is?' she said to Anna. 'Major Weisspriess meets Private Pierson at the door of my house, and forgets that he is well-born and my guest. I may be revolutionary, but I declare that in plain clothes Private Pierson is the equal of Major Weisspriess. If bravery made men equals, who would be Herr Pierson's superior? He has done me the honour, at a sacrifice of his pride, I am sure, to come here and meet his sister, and rejoice me with his society. Major Weisspriess, if I understand the case correctly, you are greatly to blame.'

'I beg to assert,' Weisspriess was saying as the duchess turned her shoulder on him.

'There is really no foundation,' Wilfrid began, with similar simplicity.

'What will sharpen the wits of these soldiers!' the duchess murmured dolefully to Laura.

'But Major Weisspriess was called out of the room by a message—was that from Private Pierson?' said Anna.

'Assuredly; I should presume so,' the duchess answered for them.

'Ay; undoubtedly,' Weisspriess supported her.

'Then,' Laura smiled encouragement to Wilfrid, 'you know nothing of Count Ammiani's marriage after all?'

Wilfrid launched his reply on a sharp repression of his breath, 'Nothing whatever.'

'And the common servant's communication was not made to you?' Anna interrogated Weisspriess.

'I simply followed in the track of Pierson,' said that officer, masking his retreat from the position with a duck of his head and a smile, tooth on lip.

'How could you ever suppose, child, that a common servant would be sent to deliver such tidings? and to Major Weisspriess!' the duchess interposed.

This broke up the Court of inquiry.

Weisspriess shortly after took his leave, on the plea that he wished to prove his friendliness by accompanying Private Pierson, who had to be on duty early next day in Milan. Amalia had seen him breaking from Anna in extreme irritation, and he had only to pledge his word that he was really bound for Milan to satisfy her. 'I believe you to be at heart humane,' she said meaningly.

'Duchess, you may be sure that I would not kill an enemy save on the point of my sword,' he answered her.

'You are a gallant man,' said Amalia, and pride was in her face as she looked on him.

She willingly consented to Wilfrid's sudden departure, as it was evident that some shot had hit him hard.

On turning to Laura, the duchess beheld an aspect of such shrewd disgust that she was provoked to exclaim: 'What on earth is the matter now?'

Laura would favour her with no explanation until they were alone in the duchess's boudoir, when she said that to call Weisspriess a gallant man was an instance of unblushing adulation of brutal strength: 'Gallant for slaying a boy? Gallant because he has force of wrist?'

'Yes; gallant;—an honour to his countrymen: and an example to some of yours,' Amalia rejoined.

'See,' cried Laura, 'to what a degeneracy your excess of national sentiment reduces you!'

While she was flowing on, the duchess leaned a hand across her shoulder, and smiling kindly, said she would not allow her to utter words that she would have to eat. 'You saw my chasseur step up to me this evening, my Laura? Well, not to torment you, he wished to sound an alarm cry after Angelo Guidascarpi. I believe my conjecture is correct, that Angelo Guidascarpi was seen by Major Weisspriess below, and allowed to pass free. Have you no remark to make?'

'None,' said Laura.

'You cannot admit that he behaved like a gallant man?'

Laura sighed deeply. 'Perhaps it was well for you to encourage him!'

The mystery of Angelo's interview with Weisspriess was cleared the next night, when in the midst of a ball-room's din, Aennchen, Amalia's favourite maid, brought a letter to Laura from Countess Ammiani. These were the contents:—

'Dearest Signora,

'You now learn a new and blessed thing. God make the marriage fruitful! I have daughter as well as son. Our Carlo still hesitated, for hearing of the disgraceful rumours in Milan, he fancied a duty lay there for him to do. Another menace came to my daughter from the madman Barto Rizzo. God can use madmen to bring about the heavenly designs. We decided that Carlo's name should cover her. My son was like a man who has awakened up. M. Powys was our good genius. He told her that he had promised you to bring it about. He, and Angelo, and myself, were the witnesses. So much before heaven! I crossed the lake with them to Stresa. I was her tirewoman, with Giacinta, to whom I will give a husband for the tears of joy she dropped upon the bed.

Blessed be it! I placed my daughter in my Carlo's arms. Both kissed their mother at parting.

'This is something fixed. I had great fears during the war. You do not yet know what it is to have a sonless son in peril. Terror and remorse haunted me for having sent the last Ammiani out to those fields, unattached to posterity.

'An envelope from Milan arrived on the morning of his nuptials. It was intercepted by me. The German made a second appointment at Como. Angelo undertook to assist me in saving my son's honour. So my Carlo had nothing to disturb his day. Pray with me, Laura Piaveni, that the day and the night of it may prove fresh springs of a river that shall pass our name through the happier mornings of Italy! I commend you to God, my dear, and am your friend,

'Marcellina, Countess Ammiani.

'P.S. Countess Alessandra will be my daughter's name.'

The letter was read and re-read before the sweeter burden it contained would allow Laura to understand that Countess Ammiani had violated a seal and kept a second hostile appointment hidden from her son.

'Amalia, you detest me,' she said, when they had left the guests for a short space, and the duchess had perused the letter, 'but acknowledge Angelo Guidascarpi's devotion. He came here in the midst of you Germans, at the risk of his life, to offer battle for his cousin.'

The duchess, however, had much more to say for the magnanimity of Major Weisspriess, who, if he saw him, had spared him; she compelled Laura to confess that Weisspriess must have behaved with some nobleness, which Laura did, humming and 'brumming,' and hinting at the experience he had gained of Angelo's skill. Her naughtiness provoked first, and then affected Amalia;

in this mood the duchess had the habit of putting on a grand air of pitying sadness. Laura knew it well, and never could make head against it. She wavered, as a stray floating thing detached from an eddy whirls and passes on the flood. Close on Amalia's bosom she sobbed out: 'Yes; you Austrians have good qualities—some: many! but you choose to think us mean because we can't readily admit them when we are under your heels. Just see me; what a crumb feeds me! I am crying with delight at a marriage!'

The duchess clasped her fondly.

'It 's not often one gets you so humble, my Laura.'

'I am crying with delight at a marriage! Amalia, look at me: you would suppose it a mighty triumph. A marriage!—two little lovers lying cheek to cheek! and me blessing heaven for its goodness! and there may be dead men unburied still on the accursed Custozza hill-top!'

Amalia let her weep. The soft affection which the duchess bore to her was informed with a slight touch of envy of a complexion that could be torn with tears one minute, and the next be fit to show in public. No other thing made her regard her friend as a southern—that is, a foreign—woman.

'Be patient,' Laura said.

'Cry; you need not be restrained,' said Amalia.

'You sighed.'

'No!'

'A sort of sigh. My fit 's over. Carlo's marriage is too surprising and delicious. I shall be laughing presently. I hinted at his marriage—I thought it among the list of possible things, no more—to see if that crystal pool, called Violetta d'Isorella, could be discoloured by stirring. Did you watch her face? I don't know what she wanted with Carlo, for she 's cold as poison—a female trifler;

one of those women whom I, and I have a chaste body, despise as worse than wantons; but she certainly did not want him to be married. It seems like a victory—though we 're beaten. You have beaten us, my dear!'

'My darling! it is your husband kisses you,' said Amalia, kissing Laura's forehead from a full heart.

CHAPTER XL

THROUGH THE WINTER

Weisspriess and Wilfrid made their way toward Milan together, silently smoking, after one attempt at conversation, which touched on Vittoria's marriage; but when they reached Monza the officer slapped his degraded brother-in-arms upon the shoulder, and asked him whether he had any inclination to crave permission to serve in Hungary. For his own part, Weisspriess said that he should quit Italy at once; he had here to skewer the poor devils, one or two weekly, or to play the mightily generous; in short, to do things unsoldierly; and he was desirous of getting away from the country. General Schöneck was at Monza, and might arrange the matter for them both. Promotion was to be looked for in Hungary; the application would please the General; one battle would restore the lieutenant's star to Wilfrid's collar. Wilfrid, who had been offended by his companion's previous brooding silence, nodded briefly, and they stopped at Monza, where they saw General Schöneck in the morning, and Wilfrid being by extraordinary favour in civilian's dress during his leave of absence, they were jointly invited to the General's table at noon, though not to meet any other officer. General Schöneck agreed

with Weisspriess that Hungary would be a better field for Wilfrid; said he would do his utmost to serve them in the manner they wished, and dismissed them after the second cigar. They strolled about the city, glad for reasons of their own to be out of Milan as long as the leave permitted. At night, when they were passing a palace in one of the dark streets, a feather, accompanied by a sharp sibilation from above, dropped on Wilfrid's face. Weisspriess held the feather up—and judged by its length that it was an eagle's, and therefore belonging to the Hungarian Hussar regiment stationed in Milan. 'The bird's aloft,' he remarked. His voice aroused a noise of feet that was instantly still. He sent a glance at the doorways, where he thought he discerned men. Fetching a whistle in with his breath, he unsheathed his sword, and seeing that Wilfrid had no weapon, he pushed him to a gate of the palace-court that had just cautiously turned a hinge. Wilfrid found his hand taken by a woman's hand inside. The gate closed behind him. He was led up to an apartment where, by the light of a darkly-veiled lamp, he beheld a young Hungarian officer and a lady clinging to his neck, praying him not to go forth. Her Italian speech revealed how matters stood in this house. The officer accosted Wilfrid: 'But you are not one of us!' He repeated it to the lady: 'You see, the man is not one of us!'

She assured him that she had seen the uniform when she dropped the feather, and wept protesting it.

'Louis, Louis! why did you come to-night! why did I make you come! You will be slain. I had my warning, but I was mad.'

The officer hushed her with a quick squeeze of her intertwisted fingers.

'Are you the man to take a sword and be at my back, sir?' he said; and resumed in a manner less contemptuous

toward the civil costume: 'I request it for the sole purpose of quieting this lady's fears.'

Wilfrid explained who and what he was. On hearing that he was General Pierson's nephew the officer laughed cheerfully, and lifted the veil from the lamp, by which Wilfrid knew him to be Colonel Prince Radocky, a most gallant and the handsomest cavalier in the Imperial service. Radocky laughed again when he was told of Weisspriess keeping guard below.

'Aha! we are three, and can fight like a pyramid.'

He flourished his hand above the lady's head, and called for a sword. The lady affected to search for one while he stalked up and down in the jaunty fashion of a Magyar horseman; but the sword was not to be discovered without his assistance, and he was led away in search of it. The moment he was alone Wilfrid burst into tears. He could bear anything better than the sight of fondling lovers. When they rejoined him, Radocky had evidently yielded some point; he stammered and worked his underlip on his moustache. The lady undertook to speak for him. Happily for her, she said, Wilfrid would not compromise her; and taking her lover's hand, she added with Italian mixture of wit and grace:—

'Happily for me, too, he does. The house is surrounded by enemies; it is a reign of terror for women. I am dead, if they slay him; but if they recognize him, I am lost.'

Wilfrid readily leaped to her conclusion. He offered his opera-hat and civil mantle to Radocky, who departed in them, leaving his military cloak in exchange. During breathless seconds the lady hung kneeling at the window. When the gate opened there was a noise as of feet preparing to rush; Weisspriess uttered an astonished cry, but addressed Radocky as 'my Pierson!' lustily and frequently; and was heard putting a number of meaningless

questions, laughing and rallying Pierson till the two passed out of hearing unmolested. The lady then kissed a Cross passionately, and shivered Wilfrid's manhood by asking him whether he knew what love was. She went on:

'Never, never love a married woman! It 's a past practice. Never! Thrust a spike in the palm of your hand, drink scalding oil, rather than do that.'

'The Prince Radocky is now safe,' Wilfrid said.

'Yes, he is safe; and he is there, and I am here: and I cannot follow him; and when will he come to me?'

The tones were lamentable. She struck her forehead, after she had mutely thrust her hand to right and left to show the space separating her from her lover.

Her voice changed when she accepted Wilfrid's adieux, to whose fate in the deadly street she appeared quite indifferent, though she gave him one or two prudent directions, and expressed a hope that she might be of service to him.

He was set upon as soon as he emerged from the gateway; the cavalry cloak was torn from his back, and but for the chance circumstance of his swearing in English, he would have come to harm. A chill went through his blood on hearing one of his assailants speak the name of Barto Rizzo. The English oath stopped an arm that flashed a dagger half its length. Wilfrid obeyed a command to declare his name, his country, and his rank. 'It 's not the prince! it 's not the Hungarian!' went many whispers; and he was drawn away by a man who requested him to deliver his reasons for entering the palace, and who appeared satisfied by Wilfrid's ready mixture of invention and fact. But the cloak! Wilfrid stated boldly that the cloak was taken by him from the Duchess of Graätli's at Como; that he had seen a tall Hussar officer slip it off his shoulders; that he had wanted

a cloak, and had appropriated it. He had entered the gate of the palace because of a woman's hand that plucked at the skirts of this very cloak.

'I saw you enter,' said the man; 'do that no more. We will not have the blood of Italy contaminated—do you hear? While that half-Austrian Medole is tip-toeing 'twixt Milan and Turin, we watch over his honour, to set an example to our women and your officers. You have outwitted us to-night. Off with you!'

Wilfrid was twirled and pushed through the crowd till he got free of them. He understood very well that they were magnanimous rascals who could let an accomplice go, though they would have driven steel into the principal.

Nothing came of this adventure for some time. Wilfrid's reflections (apart from the horrible hard truth of Vittoria's marriage, against which he dashed his heart perpetually, almost asking for anguish) had leisure to examine the singularity of his feeling a commencement of pride in the clasping of his musket;—he who on the first day of his degradation had planned schemes to stick the bayonet-point between his breast-bones: he thought as well of the queer woman's way in Countess Medole's adjuration to him that he should never love a married woman;—in her speaking, as it seemed, on his behalf, when it was but an outcry of her own acute wound. Did he love a married woman? He wanted to see one married woman for the last time; to throw a frightful look on her; to be sublime in scorn of her; perhaps to love her all the better for the cruel pain, in the expectation of being consoled. While doing duty as a military machine, these were the pictures in his mind; and so well did his routine drudgery enable him to bear them, that when he heard from General Schöneck that the term of his degradation was to continue in Italy, and from his sister that General Pierson refused to speak of him or hear of

him until he had regained his gold shoulder-strap, he revolted her with an ejaculation of gladness, and swore brutally that he desired to have no advancement; nothing but sleep and drill; and, he added conscientiously, Havannah cigars. 'He has grown to be like a common soldier,' Adela said to herself with an amazed contemplation of the family tie. Still, she worked on his behalf, having, as every woman has, too strong an instinct as to what is natural to us to believe completely in any eccentric assertion. She carried the tale of his grief and trials and his romantic devotion to the Imperial flag, daily to Countess Lena; persisting, though she could not win a responsive look from Lena's face.

One day on the review-ground, Wilfrid beheld Prince Radocky bending from his saddle in conversation with Weisspriess. The prince galloped up to General Pierson, and stretched his hand to where Wilfrid was posted as marker to a wheeling column, kept the hand stretched out, and spoke furiously, and followed the General till he was ordered to head his regiment. Wilfrid began to hug his musket less desperately. Little presents—feminine he knew by the perfumes floating round them—gloves and cigars, fine handkerchiefs, and silks for wear, came to his barracks. He pretended to accuse his sister of sending them. She in honest delight accused Lena. Lena then accused herself of not having done so.

It was winter: Vittoria had been seen in Milan. Both Lena and Wilfrid spontaneously guessed her to be the guilty one. He made a funeral pyre of the gifts and gave his sister the ashes, supposing that she had guessed with the same spirited intuition. It suited Adela to relate this lover's performance to Lena. 'He did well!' Lena said, and kissed Adela for the first time. Adela was the bearer of friendly messages to the poor private in the ranks. From her and from little Jenna, Wilfrid heard that he was

unforgotten by Countess Lena, and new hopes mingled with gratitude caused him to regard his situation seriously. He confessed to his sister that the filthy fellows, his comrades, were all but too much for him, and asked her to kiss him, that he might feel he was not one of them. But he would not send a message in reply to Lena. 'That is also well!' Lena said. Her brother Karl was a favourite with General Pierson. She proposed that Adela and herself should go to Count Karl, and urge him to use his influence with the General. This, however, Adela was disinclined to do; she could not apparently say why. When Lena went to him, she was astonished to hear that he knew every stage of her advance up to the point of pardoning her erratic lover; and even knew as much as that Wilfrid's dejected countenance on the night when Vittoria's marriage was published in the saloon of the duchess on Lake Como, had given her fresh offence. He told her that many powerful advocates were doing their best for the down-fallen officer, who, if he were shot, or killed, would still be gazetted an officer. 'A nice comfort!' said Lena, and there was a rallying exchange of banter between them, out of which she drew the curious discovery that Karl had one of his strong admirations for the English lady. 'Surely!' she said to herself; 'I thought they were all so cold.' And cold enough the English lady seemed when Lena led to the theme. 'Do I admire your brother, Countess Lena? Oh! yes;—in his uniform exceedingly.'

Milan was now full. Wilfrid had heard from Adela that Count Ammiani and his bride were in the city and were strictly watched. Why did not conspirators like these two take advantage of the amnesty? Why were they not in Rome? Their Chief was in Rome; their friends were in Rome. Why were they here? A report, coming from Countess d'Isorella, said that they had

quarrelled with their friends, and were living for love alone. As she visited the Lenkensteins—high Austrians —some believed her; and as Count Ammiani and his bride had visited the Duchess of Graätli, it was thought possible. Adela had refused to see Vittoria; she did not even know the house where Count Ammiani dwelt; so Wilfrid was reduced to find it for himself. Every hour when off duty the miserable sentimentalist wandered in that direction, nursing the pangs of a delicious tragedy of emotions; he was like a drunkard going to his draught. As soon as he had reached the head of the Corso, he wheeled and marched away from it with a lofty head, internally grinning at his abject folly, and marvelling at the stiff figure of an Austrian common soldier which flashed by the windows as he passed. He who can unite prudence and madness, sagacity and stupidity, is the true buffoon; nor, vindictive as were his sensations, was Wilfrid unaware of the contrast of Vittoria's soul to his own, that was now made up of antics. He could not endure the tones of cathedral music; but he had at times to kneel and listen to it, and be overcome.

On a night in the month of February, a servant out of livery addressed him at the barrack-gates, requesting him to go at once to a certain hotel, where his sister was staying. He went, and found there, not his sister, but Countess Medole. She smiled at his confusion. Both she and the prince, she said, had spared no effort to get him reinstated in his rank; but his uncle continually opposed the endeavours of all his friends to serve him. This interview was dictated by the prince's wish, so that he might know them to be a not ungrateful couple. Wilfrid's embarrassment in standing before a lady in private soldier's uniform, enabled him with very peculiar dignity to declare that his present degradation, from the General's point of view, was a just punishment,

and he did not crave to have it abated. She remarked that it must end soon. He made a dim allusion to the littleness of humanity. She laughed. 'It 's the language of an unfortunate lover,' she said, and straightway, in some undistinguished sentence, brought the name of Countess Alessandra Ammiani tingling to his ears. She feared that she could not be of service to him there; 'at least, not just yet,' the lady astonished him by remarking. 'I might help you to see her. If you take my advice you will wait patiently. You know us well enough to understand what patience will do. She is supposed to have married for love. Whether she did or not, you must allow a young married woman two years' grace.'

The effect of speech like this, and more in a similar strain of frank corruptness, was to cleanse Wilfrid's mind, and nerve his heart, and he denied that he had any desire to meet the Countess Ammiani, unless he could perform a service that would be agreeable to her.

The lady shrugged. 'Well, that is one way. She has enemies, of course.'

Wilfrid begged for their names.

'Who are they not?' she replied. 'Chiefly women, it is true.'

He begged most earnestly for their names; he would have pleaded eloquently, but dreaded that the intonation of one in his low garb might be taken for a whine; yet he ventured to say that if the countess did imagine herself indebted to him in a small degree, the mention of two or three of the names of Countess Alessandra Ammiani's enemies would satisfy him.

'Countess Lena von Lenkenstein, Countess Violetta d'Isorella, Signorina Irma di Karski.'

She spoke the names out like a sum that she was paying down in gold pieces, and immediately rang the bell for

her servant and carriage, as if she had now acquitted her debt. Wilfrid bowed himself forth. A resolution of the best kind, quite unconnected with his interests or his love, urged him on straight to the house of the Lenkensteins, where he sent up his name to Countess Lena. After a delay of many minutes, Count Lenkenstein accompanied by General Pierson came down, both evidently affecting not to see him. The General barely acknowledged his salute.

'Hey! Kinsky!' The count turned in the doorway to address him by the title of his regiment; 'here; show me the house inhabited by the Countess d'Isorella during the revolt.'

Wilfrid followed them to the end of the street, pointing his finger to the house, and saluted.

'An Englishman did me the favour—from pure eccentricity, of course—to save my life on that exact spot, General,' said the count. 'Your countrymen usually take the other side; therefore I mention it.'

As Wilfrid was directing his steps to barracks (the little stir to his pride superinduced by these remarks having demoralized him), Count Lenkenstein shouted: 'Are you off duty?' Wilfrid had nearly replied that he was, but just mastered himself in time. 'No, indeed!' said the count, 'when you have sent up your name to a lady.' This time General Pierson put two fingers formally to his cap, and smiled grimly at the private's rigid figure of attention. If Wilfrid's form of pride had consented to let him take delight in the fact, he would have seen at once that prosperity was ready to shine on him. He nursed the vexations much too tenderly to give prosperity a welcome; and even when alone with Lena, and convinced of her attachment, and glad of it, he persisted in driving at the subject which had brought him to her house; so that the veil of opening commonplaces,

pleasant to a couple in their position, was plucked aside. His business was to ask her why she was the enemy of Countess Alessandra Ammiani, and to entreat her that she should not seek to harm that lady. He put it in a set speech. Lena felt that it ought to have come last, not in advance of their reconciliation. 'I will answer you,' she said. 'I am not the Countess Alessandra Ammiani's enemy.'

He asked her: 'Could you be her friend?'

'Does a woman who has a husband want a friend?'

'I could reply, countess, in the case of a man who has a bride.'

By dint of a sweet suggestion here and there, love-making crossed the topic. It appeared that General Pierson had finally been attacked, on the question of his resistance to every endeavour to restore Wilfrid to his rank, by Count Lenkenstein, and had barely spoken the words—that if Wilfrid came to Countess Lena of his own free-will, unprompted, to beg her forgiveness, he would help to reinstate him, when Wilfrid's name was brought up by the chasseur. All had laughed, 'Even I,' Lena confessed. And then the couple had a pleasant pettish wrangle;—he was requested to avow that he had come solely, or principally, to beg forgiveness of her, who had such heaps to forgive. No; on his honour, he had come for the purpose previously stated, and on the spur of his hearing that she was Countess Alessandra Ammiani's deadly enemy. 'Could you believe that I was?' said Lena; 'why should I be?' and he coloured like a lad, which sign of an ingenuousness supposed to belong to her sex, made Lena bold to take the upper hand. She frankly accused herself of jealousy, though she did not say of whom. She almost admitted that when the time for reflection came, she should rejoice at his having sought her to plead for his friend rather than for her for-

giveness. In the end, but with a drooping pause of her bright swift look at Wilfrid, she promised to assist him in defeating any machinations against Vittoria's happiness, and to keep him informed of Countess d'Isorella's movements. Wilfrid noticed the withdrawing fire of the look. 'By heaven! she doubts me still,' he ejaculated inwardly.

These half-comic little people have their place in the history of higher natures and darker destinies. Wilfrid met Pericles, from whom he heard that Vittoria, with her husband's consent, had pledged herself to sing publicly. 'It is for ze Lombard widows,' Pericles apologized on her behalf; 'but, do you see, I onnly want a beginning. She thaerst for ze stage; and it is, after marriage, a good sign. Oh! you shall hear, my friend; marriage have done her no hurt—ze contrary! You shall hear Hymen —Cupids—not a cold machine; it is an organ alaif! She has privily sung to her Pericles, and sèr, and if I wake not very late on Judgement-Day, I shall zen hear—but why should I talk poetry to you, to make you laugh? I have a divin' passion for zat woman. Do I not give her to a husband, and say, Be happy! onnly sing! Be kissed! be hugged! onnly give Pericles your voice. By Saint Alexandre! it is to say to ze heavens, Move on your way, so long as you drop rain on us—you smile—you look kind.'

Pericles accompanied him into a caffè, the picture of an enamoured happy man. He waived aside contemptuously all mention of Vittoria's having enemies. She had them when, as a virgin, she had no sense. As a woman, she had none, for she now had sense. Had she not brought her husband to be sensible, so that they moved together in Milanese society, instead of stupidly fighting at Rome? so that what he could not take to himself—the marvellous voice—he let bless the multitude! 'She

is the Beethoven of singers,' Pericles concluded. Wilfrid thought so on the night when she sang to succour the Lombard widows. It was at a concert, richly thronged; ostentatiously thronged with Austrian uniforms. He fancied that he could not bear to look on her. He left the house thinking that to hear her and see her and feel that she was one upon the earth, made life less of a burden.

This evening was rendered remarkable by a man's calling out, 'You are a traitress!' while Vittoria stood before the seats. She became pale, and her eyelids closed. No thinness was subsequently heard in her voice. The man was caught as he strove to burst through the crowd at the entrance-door, and proved to be a petty bookseller of Milan, by name Sarpo, known as an orderly citizen. When taken he was inflamed with liquor. Next day the man was handed from the civil to the military authorities, he having confessed to the existence of a plot in the city. Pericles came fuming to Wilfrid's quarters. Wilfrid gathered from him that Sarpo's general confession had been retracted: it was too foolish to snare the credulity of Austrian officials. Sarpo stated that he had fabricated the story of a plot, in order to escape the persecutions of a terrible man, and find safety in prison lodgings *under Government*. The short confinement for a civic offence was not his idea of safety; he desired to be sheltered by Austrian soldiers and a fortress, and said that his torments were insupportable while Barto Rizzo was at large. This infamous Republican had latterly been living in his house, eating his bread, and threatening death to him unless he obeyed every command. Sarpo had undertaken his last mission for the purpose of supplying his lack of resolution to release himself from his horrible servitude by any other means; not from personal animosity toward the Countess Alessandra Ammiani, known as la Vittoria. When seized,

fear had urged him to escape. Such was his second story. The points seemed irreconcileable to those who were not in the habit of taking human nature into their calculations of a possible course of conduct; even Wilfrid, though he was aware that Barto Rizzo hated Vittoria inveterately, imagined Sarpo's first lie to have necessarily fathered a second. But the second story was true: and the something like lover's wrath with which the outrage to Vittoria fired Pericles, prompted him to act on it as truth. He told Wilfrid that he should summon Barto Rizzo to his presence. As the Government was unable to exhibit so much power, Wilfrid looked sarcastic; whereupon Pericles threw up his chin, crying: 'Oh! you shall know my resources. Now, my friend, one bit of paper, and a messenger, and zen home to my house, to Tokay and cigarettes, and wait to see.' He remarked after pencilling a few lines, 'Countess d'Isorella is her enemy? hein!'

'Why, you wouldn't listen to me when I told you,' said Wilfrid.

'No,' Pericles replied while writing and humming over his pencil; 'my ear is a pelican-pouch, my friend; it—and Irma is her enemy also?—it takes and keeps, but does not swallow till it wants. I shall hear you, and I shall hear my Sandra Vittoria, and I shall not know you have spoken, when by-and-by "tinkle, tinkle," a bell of my brain, and your word walks in,—"quite well?"—"very well!"—"sit down"—"if it is ze same to you, I prefer to stand"—"good; zen I examine you." My motto:—"Time opens ze gates": my system:—it is your doctor of regiment's system when your twelve, fifteen, forty recruits strip to him:—"Ah! you, my man, have varicose vein: no soldier in our regiment, you!" So on. Perhaps I am not intelligible; but, hear zis. I speak not often of my money; but I say—it is in your ear—a man

of millions, he is a king!' The Greek jumped up and folded a couple of notes. 'I will not have her disturbed. Let her sing now and awhile to Pericles and his public: and to ze Londoners, wiz your permission, Count Ammiani, one saison. I ask no more, and I am satisfied, and I endow your oldest child, Signor Conte—it is said! For its mama was a good girl, a brave girl; she troubled Pericles, because he is an intellect; but he forgives when he sees sincerity—rare zing! Sincerity and genius: it may be zey are as man and wife in a bosom. He forgives; it is not onnly voice he craves, but a soul, and Sandra, your countess, she has a soul—I am not a Turk. I say, it is a woman in whom a girl I did see a soul! A woman when she is married, she is part of ze man; but a soul, it is for ever alone, apart, confounded wiz nobody! For it I followed Sandra, your countess. It was a sublime devotion of a dog. Her voice tsrilled, her soul possessed me. Your countess is my Sandra still. I shall be pleased if child-bearing trouble her not more zan a very little; but, enfin! she is married, and you and I, my friend Wilfrid, we must accept ze decree, and say, no harm to her out of ze way of nature, by Saint Nicolas! or any what saint you choose for your invocation. Come along. And speed my letters by one of your militaires at once off. Are Pericles' millions gold of bad mint? If so, he is an incapable. He presumes it is not so. Come along; we will drink to her in essence of Tokay. You shall witness two scenes. Away!' .

Wilfrid was barely to be roused from his fit of brooding into which Pericles had thrown him. He sent the letters, and begged to be left to sleep. The image of Vittoria seen through this man's mind was new, and brought a new round of torments. 'The devil take you,' he cried when Pericles plucked at his arm, 'I 've sent the letters; isn't that enough?' He was bitterly jealous of the

Greek's philosophic review of the conditions of Vittoria's marriage; for when he had come away from the concert, not a thought of her being a wife had clouded his resignation to the fact. He went with Pericles, nevertheless, and was compelled to acknowledge the kindling powers of the essence of Tokay. 'Where do you get this stuff?' he asked several times. Pericles chattered of England, and Hagar's 'Addio,' and 'Camilla.' What cabinet operas would he not give! What entertainments! Could an emperor offer such festivities to his subjects? Was a Field Review equal to Vittoria's voice? He stung Wilfrid's ears by insisting on the mellowed depth, the soft human warmth, which marriage had lent to the voice. At a late hour his valet announced Countess d'Isorella. 'Did I not say so?' cried Pericles, and corrected himself: 'No, I did not say so; it was a surprise to you, my friend. You shall see; you shall hear. Now you shall see what a friend Pericles can be when a person satisfy him.' He pushed Wilfrid into his dressing-room, and immediately received the countess with an outburst of brutal invectives—pulling her up and down the ranked regiment of her misdeeds, as it were. She tried dignity, tried anger, she affected amazement, she petitioned for the heads of his accusations, and, as nothing stopped him, she turned to go. Pericles laughed when she had left the room. Irma di Karski was announced the next minute, and Countess d'Isorella reappeared beside her. Irma had a similar greeting. 'I am lost,' she exclaimed. 'Yes, you are lost,' said Pericles; 'a word from me, and the back of the public is humped at you—ha! contessa, you touched Mdlle. Irma's hand? She is to be on her guard, and never to think she is lost till down she goes? You are a more experienced woman! I tell you I will have no nonsense. I am Countess Alessandra Ammiani's friend. You two, you

women, are her enemies. I will ruin you both. You would prevent her singing in public places—you, Countess d'Isorella, because you do not forgive her marriage to Count Ammiani; you, Irma, to spite her for her voice. You would hiss her out of hearing, you two miserable creatures. Not another soldo for you! Not one! and to-morrow, countess, I will see my lawyer. Irma, begone, and shriek to your wardrobe! Countess d'Isorella, I have the extreme honour.'

Wilfrid marvelled to hear this titled and lovely woman speaking almost in tones of humility in reply to such outrageous insolence. She craved a private interview. Irma was temporarily expelled, and then Violetta stooped to ask what the Greek's reason for his behaviour could be. She admitted that it was in his power to ruin her, as far as money went. 'Perhaps a little farther,' said Pericles; 'say two steps. If one is on a precipice, two steps count for something.' But, what had she done? Pericles refused to declare it. This set her guessing with a charming naïveté. Pericles called Irma back to assist her in the task, and quitted them that they might consult together and hit upon the right thing. His object was to send his valet for Luigi Saracco. He had seen that no truth could be extracted from these women, save forcibly. Unaware that he had gone out, Wilfrid listened long enough to hear Irma say, between sobs: 'Oh! I shall throw myself upon his mercy. Oh, Countess d'Isorella, why did you lead me to think of vengeance! I am lost! He knows everything. Oh, what is it to me whether she lives with her husband! Let them go on plotting. I am not the Government. I am sure I don't much dislike her. Yes, I hate her, but why should I hurt myself? She will wear those jewels on her forehead; she will wear that necklace with the big amethysts, and pretend she 's humble because she doesn't carry earrings, when

her ears have never been pierced! I am lost! Yes, you may say, look up! I am only a poor singer, and he can ruin me. Oh! Countess d'Isorella, oh! what a fearful punishment. If Countess Anna should betray Count Ammiani to-night, nothing, nothing, will save me. I will confess. Let us both be beforehand with her—or you, it does not matter for a noble lady.'

'Hush!' said Violetta. 'What dreadful fool is this I sit with? You may have done what you think of doing already.'

She walked to the staircase door, and to that of the suite. An honourable sentiment, conjoined to the knowledge that he had heard sufficient, induced Wilfrid to pass on into the sleeping apartment a moment or so before Violetta took this precaution. The potent liquor of Pericles had deprived him of consecutive ideas; he sat nursing a thunder in his head, imagining it to be profound thought, till Pericles flung the door open. Violetta and Irma had departed. 'Behold! I have it; ze address of your rogue Barto Rizzo,' said Pericles, in the manner of one whose triumph is absolutely due to his own shrewdness. 'Are two women a match for me? Now, my friend, you shall see. Barto Rizzo is too clever for zis government, which cannot catch him. I catch him, and I teach him he may touch politics—it is not for him to touch Art. What! to hound men to interrupt her while she sings in public places? What next! But I knew my Countess d'Isorella could help me, and so I sent for her to confront Irma, and dare to say she knew not Barto's dwelling—and why? I will tell you a secret. A long-flattered woman, my friend, she has had, you will think, enough of it; no! she is like avarice. If it is worship of swine, she cannot refuse it. Barto Rizzo worships her; so it is a deduction—she knows his abode—

I act upon that, and I arrive at my end. I now send him to ze devil.'

Barto Rizzo, after having evaded the polizia of the city during a three months' steady chase, was effectually captured on the doorstep of Vittoria's house in the Corso Francesco, by gendarmes whom Pericles had set on his track. A day later Vittoria was stabbed at about the same hour, on the same spot. A woman dealt the blow. Vittoria was returning from an afternoon drive with Laura Piaveni and the children. She saw a woman seated on the steps as beggarwomen sit, face in lap. Anxious to shield her from the lacquey, she sent the two little ones up to her with small bits of money. But, as the woman would not lift her head, she and Laura prepared to pass her, Laura coming last. The blow, like all such unexpected incidents, had the effect of lightning on those present; the woman might have escaped, but after she had struck she sat down impassive as a cat by the hearth, with a round-eyed stare.

The news that Vittoria had been assassinated traversed the city. Carlo was in Turin, Merthyr in Rome. Pericles was one of the first who reached the house; he was coming out when Wilfrid and the Duchess of Graätli drove up; and he accused the Countess d'Isorella flatly of having instigated the murder. He was frantic. They supposed that she must have succumbed to the wound. The duchess sent for Laura. There was a press of carriages and soft-humming people in the street; many women and men sobbing. Wilfrid had to wait an hour for the duchess, who brought comfort when she came. Her first words were reassuring. 'Ah!' she said, 'did I not do well to make you drive here with me instead of with Lena? Those eyes of yours would be unpardonable to her. Yes, indeed; though a corpse were lying in this

house: but Countess Alessandra is safe. I have seen her. I have held her hand.'

Wilfrid kissed the duchess's hand passionately.

What she had said of Lena was true: Lena could only be generous upon the after-thought; and when the duchess drove Wilfrid back to her, he had to submit to hear scorn and indignation against all Italians, who were denounced as cut-throats, and worse and worse and worse, males and females alike. This was grounded on her sympathy for Vittoria. But Wilfrid now felt toward the Italians through his remembrance of that devoted soul's love of them, and with one direct look he bade his betrothed good-bye, and they parted.

It was in the early days of March that Merthyr, then among the Republicans of Rome, heard from Laura Piaveni. Two letters reached him, one telling of the attempted assassination, and a second explaining circumstances connected with it. The first summoned him to Milan; the other left it to his option to make the journey. He started, carrying kind messages from the Chief to Vittoria, and from Luciano Romara the offer of a renewal of old friendship to Count Ammiani. His political object was to persuade the Lombard youth to turn their whole strength upon Rome. The desire of his heart was again to see her, who had been so nearly lost to all eyes for ever.

Laura's first letter stated brief facts. 'She was stabbed this afternoon, at half-past two, on the steps of her house, by a woman called the wife of Barto Rizzo. She caught her hands up under her throat when she saw the dagger. Her right arm was penetrated just above the wrist, and half an inch in the left breast, close to the centre bone. She behaved firmly. The assassin only struck once. No visible danger; but you should come, if you have no serious work.'

'Happily,' ran the subsequent letter, of two days' later date, 'the assassin was a woman, and one effort exhausts a woman; she struck only once, and became idiotic. Sandra has no fever. She had her wits ready—where were mine?—when she received the wound. While I had her in my arms, she gave orders that the woman should be driven out of the city in her carriage. The Greek, her mad musical adorer, accuses Countess d'Isorella. Carlo has seen this person—returns convinced of her innocence. That is not an accepted proof; but we have one. It seems that Rizzo (Sandra was secret about it and about one or two other things) sent to her commanding her to appoint an hour—detestable style! I can see it now; I fear these conspiracies no longer:—she did appoint an hour; and was awaiting him when the gendarmes sprang on the man at her door. He had evaded them several weeks, so we are to fancy that his wife charged Countess Alessandra with the betrayal. This appears a reasonable and simple way of accounting for the deed. So I only partly give credit to it. But it may be true.

'The wound has not produced a shock to her system—very, very fortunately. On the whole, a better thing could not have happened. Should I be more explicit? Yes, to you; for you are not of those who see too much in what is barely said. The wound, then, my dear good friend, has healed another wound, of which I knew nothing. Bergamasc and Brescian friends of her husband's, have imagined that she interrupted or *diverted his studies*. He also discovered that she had an opinion of her own, and sometimes he consulted it; but alas! they are lovers, and he knew not when love listened, or she when love spoke; and there was grave business to be done meanwhile. Can you kindly allow that the case was open to a little confusion? I know that you will. He had to

hear many violent reproaches from his *fellow-students*. These have ceased. I send this letter on the chance of the first being lost on the road; and it will supplement the first pleasantly to you in any event. She lies here in the room where I write, propped on high pillows, the right arm bound up, and says: "Tell Merthyr I prayed to be in Rome with my husband, and him, and the Chief. Tell him I love my friend. Tell him I think he deserves to be in Rome. Tell him——" Enter Countess Ammiani to reprove her for endangering the hopes of the house by fatiguing herself. Sandra sends a blush at me, and I smile, and the countess kisses her. I send you a literal transcript of one short scene, so that you may feel at home with us.

'There is a place called Venice, and there is a place called Rome, and both places are pretty places and famous places; and there is a thing called the fashion; and these pretty places and famous places set the fashion: and there is a place called Milan, and a place called Bergamo, and a place called Brescia, and they all want to follow the fashion, for they are giddy-pated baggages. What is the fashion, mama? The fashion, my dear, is etc. etc. etc.:—Extract of lecture to my little daughter, Amalia, who says she forgets you; but Giacomo sends his manly love. Oh, good God! should I have blood in my lips when I kissed him, if I knew that he was old enough to go out with a sword in his hand a week hence? I seem every day to be growing more and more *all mother*. This month in front of us is full of thunder. Addio!'

When Merthyr stood in sight of Milan an army was issuing from the gates.

CHAPTER XLI

THE INTERVIEW

MERTHYR saw Laura first. He thought that Vittoria must be lying on her couch: but Laura simply figured her arm in a sling, and signified, more than said, that Vittoria was well and taking the air. She then begged hungrily for news of Rome, and again of Rome, and sat with her hands clasped in her lap to listen. She mentioned Venice in a short breath of praise, as if her spirit could not repose there. Rome, its hospitals, its municipal arrangements, the names of the triumvirs, the prospects of the city, the edicts, the aspects of the streets, the popularity of the Government, the number of volunteers ranked under the magical Republic—of these things Merthyr talked, at her continual instigation, till, stopping abruptly, he asked her if she wished to divert him from any painful subject. 'No, no!' she cried, 'it 's only that I want to feel an anchor. We are all adrift. Sandra is in perfect health. Our bodies, dear Merthyr, are enjoying the perfection of comfort. Nothing is done here except to keep us from boiling over.

'Why does not Count Ammiani come to Rome?' said Merthyr.

'Why are we not all in Rome? Yes, why! why! We should make a carnival of our own if we were.'

'She would have escaped that horrible knife,' Merthyr sighed.

'Yes, she would have escaped that horrible knife. But see the difference between Milan and Rome, my friend! It was a blessed knife here. It has given her husband back to her; it has destroyed the intrigues

against her. It seems to have been sent—I was kneeling in the cathedral this morning, and had the very image crossing my eyes—from the saints of heaven to cut the black knot. Perhaps it may be the means of sending us to Rome.'

Laura paused, and, looking at him, said, 'It is so utterly impossible for us women to comprehend love without folly in a man; the trait by which we recognize it! Merthyr, you dear Englishman, *you* shall know everything. Do we not think a tisane a weak washy drink, when we are strong? But we learn, when we lie with our chins up, and our ten toes like stopped organ-pipes—as Sandra says—we learn then that it means fresh health and activity, and is better than rivers of your fiery wines. You love her, do you not?'

The question came with great simplicity.

'If I can give a proof of it, I am ready to answer,' said Merthyr, in some surprise.

'Your whole life is the proof of it. The women of your country are intolerable to me, Merthyr: but I do see the worth of the men. Sandra has taught me. She can think of you, talk of you, kiss the vision of you, and still be a faithful woman in our bondage of flesh; and to us you know what a bondage it is. How can that be? I should have asked, if I had not seen it. Dearest, she loves her husband, and she loves you. She has two husbands, and she turns to the husband of her spirit when that, or any, dagger strikes her bosom. Carlo has an unripe mind. They have been married but a little more than four months; and he reveres her and loves her.' . . . Laura's voice dragged. 'Multiply the months by thousands, we shall not make those two lives one. It is the curse of man's education in Italy? He can see that she has wits and courage. He will not consent to make use of them. You know her: she is

not one to talk of these things. She, who has both heart and judgement—she is merely a little boat tied to a big ship. Such is their marriage. She cannot influence him. She is not allowed to advise him. And she is the one who should lead the way. And if she did, we should now be within sight of the City.'

Laura took his hand. She found it moist, though his face was calm and his chest heaved regularly. An impish form of the pity women feel for us at times moved her to say, 'Your skin is as bronzed as it was last year. Sandra spoke of it. She compared it to a young vine-leaf. I wonder whether girls have really an admonition of what is good for them while they are going their ways like destined machines?'

'Almost all men are of flesh and blood,' said Merthyr softly.

'I spoke of girls.'

'I speak of men.'

'Blunt-witted that I am! Of course you did. But do not imagine that she is not happy with her husband. They are united firmly.'

'The better for her, and him, and me,' said Merthyr.

Laura twisted an end of her scarf with fretful fingers. 'Carlo Alberto has crossed the Ticino?'

'Is about to do so,' Merthyr rejoined.

'Will Rome hold on if he is defeated?'

'Rome has nothing to fear on that side.'

'But you do not speak hopefully of Rome.'

'I suppose I am thinking of other matters.'

'You confess it!'

The random conversation wearied him. His foot tapped the floor.

'Why do you say that?' he asked.

'Verily, for no other reason than that I have a wicked curiosity, and that you come from Rome,' said Laura, now

perfectly frank, and believing that she had explained her enigmatical talk, if she had not furnished an excuse for it. Merthyr came from the City which was now encircled by an irradiating halo in her imagination, and a fit of spontaneous inexplicable feminine tenderness being upon her at the moment of their meeting, she found herself on a sudden prompted to touch and probe and brood voluptuously over an unfortunate lover's feelings, supposing that they existed. For the glory of Rome was on him, and she was at the same time angry with Carlo Ammiani. It was the form of passion her dedicated widowhood could still be subject to in its youth; the sole one. By this chance Merthyr learnt what nothing else would have told him.

Her tale of the attempted assassination was related with palpable indifference. She stated the facts. 'The woman seemed to gasp while she had her hand up; she struck with no force; and she has since been inanimate, I hear. The doctor says that a spasm of the heart seized her when she was about to strike. It has been shaken—I am not sure that he does not say displaced, or unseated—by some one of her black tempers. She shot Rinaldo Guidascarpi dead. Perhaps it was that. I am informed that she worshipped the poor boy, and has been like a trapped she-wolf since she did it. In some way she associated our darling with Rinaldo's death, like the brute she is. The ostensible ground for her futile bit of devilishness was that she fancied Sandra to have betrayed Barto Rizzo, her husband, into the hands of the polizia. He wrote to the Countess Alessandra—such a letter!—a curiosity!—he must see her and cross-examine her to satisfy himself that she was a true patriot, etc. You know the style: we neither of us like it. Sandra was waiting to receive him when they pounced on him by the door. Next day the woman struck at her. Decidedly a hand-

some woman. She is the exact contrast to the Countess Violetta in face, in everything. Heart-disease will certainly never affect that pretty spy! But, mark,' pursued Laura, warming, 'when Carlo arrived, tears, penitence, heaps of self-accusations: he had been unkind to her even on Lake Orta, where they passed their golden month; he had neglected her at Turin; he had spoken angry words in Milan; in fact, he had misused his treasure, and begged pardon;—"If you please, my poor bleeding angel, I am sorry. But do not, I entreat, distract me with petitions of any sort, though I will perform anything earthly to satisfy you. Be a good little boat in the wake of the big ship. I will look over at you, and chirrup now and then to you, my dearest, when I am not engaged in piloting extraordinary."—Very well; I do not mean to sneer at the unhappy boy, Merthyr; I love him; he was my husband's brother-in-arms; the sweetest lad ever seen. He is in the season of faults. He must command; he must be a chief; he fancies he can intrigue —poor thing! It will pass. And so will the hour to be forward to Rome. But I call your attention to this: when he heard of the dagger—I have it from Colonel Corte, who was with him at the time in Turin—he cried out Violetta d'Isorella's name. Why? After he had buried his head an hour on Sandra's pillow, he went straight to Countess d'Isorella, and was absent till night. The woman is hideous to me. No; don't conceive that I think her Sandra's rival. She is too jealous. She has him in some web. If she has not ruined him, she will. She was under my eyes the night she heard of his marriage: I saw how she will look at seventy! Here is Carlo at the head of a plot she has prepared for him; and he has Angelo Guidascarpi, and Ugo Corte, Marco Sana, Giulio Bandinelli, and about fifty others. They have all been kept away from Rome by that detestable——you object

to hear bad names cast on women, Merthyr. Hear Agostino! The poor old man comes daily to this house to persuade Carlo to lead his band to Rome. It is so clearly Rome—Rome, where all his comrades are; where the chief stand must be made by the side of Italy's Chief. Worst sign of all, it has been hinted semi-officially to Carlo that he may upon application be permitted to re-issue his journal. Does not that show that the Government wishes to blindfold him, and keep him here, and knows his plans?'

Laura started up as the door opened, and Vittoria appeared leaning upon Carlo's arm. Countess Ammiani, Countess d'Isorella, and Pericles were behind them. Laura's children followed.

When Merthyr rose, Vittoria was smiling in Carlo's face at something that had been spoken. She was pale, and her arm was in a sling, but there was no appearance of her being unnerved. Merthyr waited for her recognition of him. She turned her eyes from Carlo slowly. The soft dull smile in them died out as it were with a throb, and then her head drooped on one shoulder, and she sank to the floor.

CHAPTER XLII

THE SHADOW OF CONSPIRACY

Merthyr left the house at Laura's whispered suggestion. He was agitated beyond control, for Vittoria had fallen with her eyes fixed on him; and at times the picture of his beloved, her husband, and Countess Ammiani, and the children bending over her still body, swam before him like a dark altar-piece floating in incense, so lost was he to the reality of that scene. He did not hear Beppo,

his old servant, at his heels. After awhile he walked calmly, and Beppo came up beside him. Merthyr shook his hand.

'Ah, Signor Mertyrio! ah, padrone!' said Beppo.

Merthyr directed his observation to a regiment of Austrians marching down the Corso Venezia to the Ticinese gate.

'Yes, they are ready enough for us,' Beppo remarked. 'Perhaps Carlo Alberto will beat them this time. If he does, viva to him! If they beat him, down goes another Venetian pyramid. The Countess Alessandra——' Beppo's speech failed.

'What of your mistress?' said Merthyr.

'When she dies, my dear master, there 's no one for me but the Madonna to serve.'

'Why should she die, silly fellow?'

'Because she never cries.'

Merthyr was on the point of saying, 'Why should she cry?' His heart was too full, and he shrank from inquisitive shadows of the thing known to him.

'Sit down at this caffè with me,' he said. 'It 's fine weather for March. The troops will camp comfortably. Those Hungarians never require tents. Did you see much sacking of villages last year?'

'Padrone, the Imperial command is always to spare the villages.'

'That 's humane.'

'Padrone, yes; if policy is humanity.'

'It 's humanity not carried quite as far as we should wish it.'

Beppo shrugged and said: 'It won't leave much upon the conscience if we kill them.'

'Do you expect a rising?' said Merthyr.

'If the Ticino overflows, it will flood Milan,' was the answer.

'And your occupation now is to watch the height of the water?'

'My occupation, padrone? I am not on the watch-tower.' Beppo winked, adding: 'I have my occupation.' He threw off the effort or pretence to be discreet. 'Master of my soul! this is my occupation. I drink coffee, but I do not smoke, because I have to kiss a pretty girl, who means to object to the smell of the smoke. Via! I know her! At five she draws me into the house.'

'Are you relating your amours to me, rascal?' Merthyr interposed.

'Padrone, at five precisely she draws me into the house. She is a German girl. Pardon me if I make no war on women. Her name is Aennchen, which one is able to say if one grimaces;—why not? It makes her laugh; and German girls are amiable when one can make them laugh. 'Tis so that they begin to melt. Behold the difference of races! I must kiss her to melt her, and then have a quarrel. I could have it after the first, or the fiftieth with an Italian girl; but my task will be excessively difficult with a German girl, if I am compelled to allow myself to favour her with one happy solicitation for a kiss, to commence with. We shall see. It is, as my abstention from tobacco declares, an anticipated catastrophe.'

'Long-worded, long-winded, obscure, affirmatizing by negatives, confessing by implication!—where 's the beginning and the end of you, and what 's your meaning?' said Merthyr, who talked to him as one may talk to an Italian servant.

'The contessa, my mistress, has enemies. Padrone, I devote myself to her service.'

'By making love to a lady's maid?'

'Padrone, a rat is not born to find his way up the grand staircase. She has enemies. One of them was

the sublime Barto Rizzo—admirable—though I must hate him. He said to his wife: "If a thing happens to me, stab to the heart the Countess Alessandra Ammiani."'

'Inform me how you know that?' said Merthyr.

Beppo pointed to his head, and Merthyr smiled. To imagine, invent, and believe, were spontaneous with Beppo when his practical sagacity was not on the stretch. He glanced at the caffè clock.

'Padrone, at eleven to-night shall I see you here? At eleven I shall come like a charged cannon. I have business. I have seen my mistress's blood! I will tell you: this German girl lets me know that some one detests my mistress. Who? I am off to discover. But who is the damned creature? I must coo and kiss, while my toes are dancing on hot plates, to find her out. Who is she? If she were half Milan . . .'

His hands waved in outline the remainder of the speech, and he rose, but sat again. He had caught sight of the spy, Luigi Saracco, addressing the Signor Antonio-Pericles in his carriage. Pericles drove on. The horses presently turned, and he saluted Merthyr.

'She has but one friend in Milan: it is myself,' was his introductory remark. 'My poor child! my dear Powys, she is the best—"I cannot sing to you to-day, dear Pericles"—she said that after she had opened her eyes; after the first mist, you know. She is the best child upon earth. I could wish she were a devil, my Powys. Such a voice should be in an iron body. But she has immense health. The doctor, who is also mine, feels her pulse. He assures me it goes as Time himself, and Time, my friend, you know, has the intention of going a great way. She is good: she is too good. She makes a baby of Pericles, to whom what is woman? Have I not the sex in my pocket? Her husband, he is a fool, sèr.' Pericles broke thundering into a sentence of English, fell in love

with it, and resumed in the same tongue: 'I—it is I zat am her guard, her safety. Her husband—oh! she must marry a young man, little donkey zat she is! We accept it as a destiny, my Powys. And he plays false to her. Good; I do not object. But, imagine in your own mind, my Powys—instead of passion, of rage, of tempest, she is frozen wiz a repose. Do you, hein? sink it will come out,'—Pericles eyed Merthyr with a subtle smile askew,—'I have sot so;—it will come out when she is one day in a terrible scene. . . . Mon Dieu! it was a terrible scene for me when I looked on ze clout zat washed ze blood of ze terrible assassination. So goes out a voice, possibly! Divine, you say? We are a machine. Now, you behold, she has faints. It may happen at my concert where she sings to-morrow night. You saw me in my carriage speaking to a man. He is my spy—my dog wiz a nose. I have set him upon a woman. If zat woman has a plot for to-morrow night to spoil my concert, she shall not know where she shall wake to-morrow morning after. Ha! here is military music—twenty sossand doors jam on horrid hinge; and right, left, right, left, to it, confound! like dolls all wiz one face. Look at your soldiers, Powys. Put zem on a stage, and you see all background people—a bawling chorus. It shows to you how superior it is—a stage to life! Hark to such music! I cannot stand it; I am driven away; I am violent; I rage.'

Pericles howled the name of his place of residence, with an offer of lodgings in it, and was carried off writhing his body as he passed a fine military marching band.

The figure of old Agostino Balderini stood in front of Merthyr. They exchanged greetings. At the mention of Rome, Agostino frowned impatiently. He spoke of Vittoria in two or three short exclamations, and was about to speak of Carlo, but checked his tongue. 'Judge for

yourself. Come, and see, and approve, if you can. Will you come? There 's a meeting; there 's to be a resolution. Question—Shall we second the King of Sardinia, Piedmont, and Savoy? If so, let us set this pumpkin, called Milan, on its legs. I shall be an attentive listener like you, my friend. I speak no more.'

Merthyr went with him to the house of a carpenter, where in one of the uppermost chambers communicating with the roof, Ugo Corte, Marco Sana, Giulio Bandinelli, and others, sat waiting for the arrival of Carlo Ammiani; when he came Carlo had to bear with the looks of mastiffs for being late. He shook Merthyr's hand hurriedly, and as soon as the door was fastened, began to speak. His first sentence brought a grunt of derision from Ugo Corte. It declared that there was no hope of a rising in Milan. Carlo swung round upon the Bergamasc. 'Observe our leader,' Agostino whispered to Merthyr; 'it would be kindness to give him a duel.' More than one tumult of outcries had to be stilled before Merthyr gathered any notion of the designs of the persons present. Bergamasc sneered at Brescian, and both united in contempt of the Milanese, who, having a burden on their minds, appealed at once to their individual willingness to use the sword in vindication of Milan against its traducers. By a great effort, Carlo got some self-mastery. He admitted, colouring horribly, that Brescia and Bergamo were ready, and Milan was not; therefore those noble cities (he read excerpts from letters showing their readiness) were to take the lead, and thither on the morrow-night he would go, let the tidings from the king's army be what they might.

Merthyr quitted the place rather impressed by his eloquence, but unfavourably by his feverish look. Countess d'Isorella had been referred to as one who served the cause ably and faithfully. In alluding to her,

Carlo bit his lip; he did not proceed until surrounding murmurs of satisfaction encouraged him to continue a sort of formal eulogy of the lady, which proved to be a defence against foregone charges, for Corte retracted an accusation, and said that he had no fault to find with the countess. A proposal to join the enterprise was put to Merthyr, but his engagement with the Chief in Rome saved him from hearing much of the marvellous facilities of the plot. 'I should have wished to see you to-night,' Carlo said as they were parting. Merthyr named his hotel. Carlo nodded. 'My wife is still slightly feeble,' he said.

'I regret it,' Merthyr rejoined.

'She is not ill.'

'No, it cannot be want of courage,' Merthyr spoke at random.

'Yes, that 's true,' said Carlo, as vacantly. 'You will see her while I am travelling.'

'I hope to find the Countess Alessandra well enough to receive me.'

'Always; always,' said Carlo, wishing apparently to say more. Merthyr waited an instant, but Carlo broke into a conventional smile of adieu.

'While he is *travelling*,' Merthyr repeated to Agostino, who had stood by during the brief dialogue, and led the way to the Corso.

'He did not say how far!' was the old man's ejaculation.

'But, good heaven! if you think he 's on an unfortunate errand, why don't you stop him, advise him?' Merthyr broke out.

'Advise him! stop him! my friend. I would advise him, if I had the patience of angels; stop him, if I had the power of Lucifer. Did you not see that he shunned speaking to me? I have been such a perpetual dish of

vinegar under his nose for the last month, that the poor fellow sniffs when I draw near. He must go his way. He leads a torrent that must sweep him on. Corte, Sana, and the rest, would be in Rome now, but for him. So should I. Your Agostino, however, is not of Bergamo, or of Brescia; he is not a madman; simply a poor rheumatic Piedmontese, who discerns the point where a united Italy may fix its standard. I would start for Rome to-morrow, if I could leave her—my soul's child!' Agostino raised his hand: 'I do love the woman, Countess Alessandra Ammiani. I say, she is a peerless woman. Is she not?'

'There is none like her,' said Merthyr.

'A peerless woman, recognized and sacrificed! I cannot leave her. If the Government here would lay hands on Carlo and do their worst at once, I would be off. They are too wary. I believe that they are luring him to his ruin. I can give no proofs, but I judge by the best evidence. What avails my telling him? I lose my temper the moment I begin to speak. A curst witch beguiles the handsome idiot—poor darling lad that he is! She has him—can I tell you how? She has got him—got him fast! The nature of the chains are doubtless innocent, if those which a woman throws round us be ever distinguishable. He loves his wife—he is not a monster.'

'He appears desperately feverish,' said Merthyr.

'Did you not notice it? Yes, like a man pushed by his destiny out of the path. He is ashamed to hesitate; he cannot turn back. Ahead of him he sees a gulf. That army of Carlo Alberto may do something under its Pole. Prophecy is too easy. I say no more. We *may* have Lombardy open; and if so, my poor boy's vanity will be crowned: he will only have the king and his army against him then.'

Discoursing in this wise, they reached the caffè where Beppo had appointed to meet his old master, and sat amid here and there a whitecoat, and many nods and whispers over such news as the privileged journals and the official gazette afforded.

Beppo's destination was to the Duchess of Graätli's palace. Nearing it, he perceived Luigi endeavouring to gain a passage beside the burly form of Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz, who presently seized him and hurled him into the road. As Beppo was sidling up the courtway, Jacob sprang back; Luigi made a rush; Jacob caught them both, but they wriggled out of his clutch, and Luigi, being the fearfuller, ran the farthest. While he was out of hearing, Beppo told Jacob to keep watch upon Luigi, as the bearer of an amorous letter from a signor of quality to Aennchen, the which he himself desired to obtain sight of; 'for the wench has caused me three sleepless nights,' he confessed frankly. Jacob affected not to understand. Luigi and Beppo now leaned against the wall on either side of him and baited him till he shook with rage.

'He is the lord of the duchess, his mistress—what a lucky fellow!' said Luigi. 'When he 's dog at the gates no one can approach her. When he isn't, you can fancy what!' 'He 's only a mechanical contrivance; he 's not a man,' said Beppo. 'He 's the principal flea-catcher of the palace,' said Luigi; 'here he is all day, and at night the devil knows where he hunts.'—Luigi hopped in a half-circle round the exacerbated Jacob, and finally provoked an assault that gave an opening to Beppo. They all ran in, Luigi last. Jacob chased Beppo up the stairs, lost him, and remembered what he had said of the letter borne by Luigi, for whom he determined to lie in waiting. 'Better two in there than one,' he thought. The two courted his Aennchen openly; but Luigi, as

the bearer of an amorous letter from the signor of quality, who could be no other than Signor Antonio-Pericles, was the one to be intercepted. Like other jealous lovers, Jacob wanted to read Aennchen's answer, to be cured of his fatal passion for the maiden, and on this he set the entire force of his mind.

Running up by different staircases, Beppo and Luigi came upon Aennchen nearly at the same time. She turned a cold face on Beppo, and requested Luigi to follow her. Astonished to see him in such favour, Beppo was ready to provoke the quarrel before the kiss when she returned; but she said that she had obeyed her mistress's orders, and was obeying the duchess in refusing to speak of them, or of anything relating to them. She had promised him an interview in that little room leading into the duchess's boudoir. He pressed her to conduct him. 'Ah; then it 's not for me you come,' she said. Beppo had calculated that the kiss would open his way to the room, and the quarrel disembarrass him of his pretty companion when there. 'You have come to listen to conversation again,' said Aennchen. 'Ach! the fool a woman is to think that you Italians have any idea except self-interest when you, when you . . . talk nonsense to us. Go away, if you please. Good-evening.' She dropped a curtsey with a surly coquetry, charming of its kind. Beppo protested that the room was dear to him because there first he had known for one blissful half-second the sweetness of her mouth.

'Who told you that persons who don't like your mistress are going to talk in there?' said Aennchen.

'You,' said Beppo.

Aennchen drew up in triumph: 'And now will you pretend that you didn't come up here to go in there to listen to what they say?'

Beppo clapped hands at her cleverness in trapping him.

'Hush,' said all her limbs and features, belying the previous formal 'good-evening.' He refused to be silent, thinking it a way of getting to the little antechamber. 'Then, I tell you, downstairs you go,' said Aennchen stiffly.

'Is it decided?' Beppo asked. 'Then good-evening. You detestable German girls can't love. One step—a smile: another step — a kiss. You tit-for-tat minx! Have you no notion of the sacredness of the sentiments which inspire me to petition that the place for our interview should be there where I tasted ecstatic joy for the space of a flash of lightning? I will go; but it is there that I will go, and I will await you there, Signorina Aennchen. Yes, laugh at me! laugh at me!'

'No; really, I don't laugh at you, Signor Beppo,' said Aennchen, protesting in denial of what she was doing. 'This way.'

'No, it 's that way,' said Beppo.

'It 's through here.' She opened a door. 'The duchess has a reception to-night, and you can't go round. Ach! you would not betray me?'

'Not if it were the duchess herself,' said Beppo; he would refuse to satisfy man's natural vanity in such a case.

Eager to advance to the little antechamber, he allowed Aennchen to wait behind him. He heard the door shut and a lock turn, and he was in the dark, and alone, left to take counsel of his fingers' ends.

'She was born to it,' Beppo remarked, to extenuate his outwitted cunning, when he found each door of the room fast against him.

On the following night Vittoria was to sing at a concert in the Duchess of Graätli's great saloon, and the duchess had humoured Pericles by consenting to his preposterous request that his spy should have an opportunity of

hearing Countess d'Isorella and Irma di Karski in private conversation together, to discover whether there was any plot of any sort to vex the evening's entertainment; as the jealous spite of those two women, Pericles said, was equal to any devilry on earth. It happened that Countess d'Isorella did not come. Luigi, in despair, was the hearer of a quick question and answer dialogue, in the obscure German tongue, between Anna von Lenkenstein and Irma di Karski; but a happy peep between the hanging curtains gave him sight of a letter passing from Anna's hands to Irma's. Anna quitted her. Irma was looking at the superscription of the letter, in the act of passing in her steps, when Luigi tore the curtains apart, and sprang on her arm like a cat. Before her shrieks could bring succour, Luigi was bounding across the court with the letter in his possession. A dreadful hug awaited him; his pockets were ransacked, and he was pitched aching into the street. Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz went straightway under a gas-lamp, where he read the address of the letter to Countess d'Isorella. He doubted; he had a half-desire to tear the letter open. But a rumour of the attack upon Irma had spread among the domestics, and Jacob prudently went up to his mistress. The duchess was sitting with Laura. She received the letter, eyed it all over, and held it to a candle. Laura's head was bent in dark meditation. The sudden increase of light aroused her, and she asked, 'What is that?'

'A letter from Countess Anna to Countess d'Isorella,' said the duchess.

'Burnt!' Laura screamed.

'It 's only fair,' the duchess remarked.

'From her to that woman! It may be priceless. Stop! Let me see what remains. Amalia! are you mad? Oh! you false friend. I would have sacrificed my right hand to see it.'

'Try and love me still,' said the duchess, letting her take one unburnt corner, and crumble the black tissuey fragments to smut in her hands.

There was no writing; the unburnt corner of the letter was a blank.

Laura fooled the wretched ashes between her palms. 'Good-night,' she said. 'Your face will be of this colour to me, my dear, for long.'

'I cannot behave disgracefully, even to keep your love, my beloved,' said the duchess.

'You cannot betray a German, you mean,' Laura retorted. 'You could let a spy into the house.'

'That was a childish matter—merely to satisfy a whim.'

'I say you could let a spy into the house. Who is to know where the scruples of you women begin? I would have given my jewels, my head, my husband's sword, for a sight of that letter. I swear that it concerns us. Yes, *us*. You are a false friend. Fish-blooded creature! may it be a year before I look on you again. Hide among your miserable set!'

'Judge me when you are cooler, dearest,' said the duchess, seeking to detain the impetuous sister of her affection by the sweeping skirts; but Laura spurned her touch, and went from her.

Irma drove to Countess d'Isorella's. Violetta was abed, and lay fair and placid as a Titian Venus, while Irma sputtered out her tale, with intermittent sobs. She rose upon her elbow, and planting it in her pillow, took half-a-dozen puffs of a cigarette, and then requested Irma to ring for her maid. 'Do nothing till you see me again,' she said; 'and take my advice: always get to bed before midnight, or you 'll have unmanageable wrinkles in a couple of years. If you had been in bed at a prudent hour to-night, this scandal would not have occurred.'

'How can I be in bed? How could I help it?' moaned Irma, replying to the abstract rule, and the perplexing illustration of its force.

Violetta dismissed her. 'After all, my wish is to save my poor Amaranto,' she mused. 'I am only doing now what I should have been doing in the daylight; and if I can't stop him, the Government must; and they will. Whatever the letter contained, I can anticipate it. He knows my profession and my necessities. I must have money. Why not from the rich German woman whom he jilted?'

She attributed Anna's apparent passion of revenge to a secret passion of unrequited love. What else was implied by her willingness to part with land and money for the key to his machinations?

Violetta would have understood a revenge directed against Angelo Guidascarpi, as the slayer of Anna's brother. But of him Anna had only inquired once, and carelessly, whether he was in Milan. Anna's mystical semi-patriotism—prompted by her hatred of Vittoria, hatred of Carlo as Angelo's cousin and protector, hatred of the Italy which held the three, who never took the name *Tedesco* on their tongues without loathing—was perfectly hidden from this shrewd head.

Some extra patrols were in the streets. As she stepped into the carriage, a man rushed up, speaking hoarsely and inarticulately, and jumped in beside her. She had discerned Barto Rizzo in time to give directions to her footman, before she was addressed by a body of gendarmes in pursuit, whom she mystified by entreating them to enter her house and search it through, if they supposed that any evil-doer had taken advantage of the open door. They informed her that a man had escaped from the civil prison. 'Poor creature!' said the countess, with womanly pity; 'but you must see that he is not in my

house. How could three of you let one escape?' She drove off laughing at their vehement assertion that he would not have escaped from them. Barto Rizzo made her conduct him to Countess Ammiani's gates. Violetta was frightened by his eyes when she tried to persuade him in her best coaxing manner to avoid Count Ammiani. In fact she apprehended that he would be very much in her way. She had no time for chagrin at her loss of power over him, though she was sensible of vexation. Barto folded his arms and sat with his head in his chest, silent, till they reached the gates, when he said in French, 'Madame, I am a nameless person in your train. Gabble!' he added, when the countess advised him not to enter; nor would he allow her to precede him by more than one step. Violetta sent up her name. The man had shaken her nerves. 'At least, remember that your appearance should be decent,' she said, catching sight of blood on his hands, and torn garments. 'I expect, madame,' he replied, 'I shall not have time to wash before I am laid out. My time is short. I want tobacco. The washing can be done by-and-by, but not the smoking.'

They were ushered up to the reception-room, where Countess Ammiani, Vittoria, and Carlo sat, awaiting the visitor whose unexpected name, cast in their midst at so troubled a season, had clothed her with some of the midnight's terrors.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE LAST MEETING IN MILAN

Barto Rizzo had silence about him without having to ask for it, when he followed Violetta into Countess Ammiani's saloon of reception. Carlo was leaning over

his mother's chair, holding Vittoria's wrist across it, and so enclosing her, while both young faces were raised to the bowed forehead of the countess. They stood up. Violetta broke through the formal superlatives of an Italian greeting. 'Speak to me alone,' she murmured for Carlo's ear: and glancing at Barto: 'Here is a madman; a mild one, I trust.' She contrived to show that she was not responsible for his intrusion. Countess Ammiani gathered Vittoria in her arms; Carlo stepped a pace before them. Terror was on the venerable lady's face, wrath on her son's. As he fronted Barto, he motioned a finger to the curtain hangings, and Violetta, quick at reading signs, found his bare sword there. 'But you will not want it,' she remarked, handing the hilt to him, and softly eyeing the impression of her warm touch on the steel as it passed.

'Carlo, thou son of Paolo! Countess Marcellina, wife of a true patriot! stand aside, both of you. It is between the Countess Alessandra and myself,' so the man commenced, with his usual pomp of interjection. 'Swords and big eyes—are they things to stop me?' Barto laughed scornfully. He had spoken in the full roll of his voice, and the sword was hard back for the thrust.

Vittoria disengaged herself from the Countess. 'Speak to me,' she said, dismayed by the look of what seemed an exaltation of madness in Barto's visage, but firm as far as the trembling of her limbs would let her be.

He dropped to her feet and kissed them.

'Emilia Alessandra Belloni! Vittoria! Countess Alessandra Ammiani! pity me. Hear this:—I hated you as the devil is hated. Yesterday I woke up in prison to hear that I must adore you. God of all the pits of punishment! was there ever one like this? I had to change heads.'

It was the language of a distorted mind, and lamentable to hear when a sob shattered his voice.

'Am I mad?' he asked piteously, clasping his temples.

'You are as we are, if you weep,' said Vittoria, to soothe him.

'Then I have *been* mad!' he cried, starting. 'I knew you a wicked virgin—signora contessa, confess to me, marriage has changed you. Has it not changed you? In the name of the Father of the Saints, help me out of it: —my brain reels backwards. You were false, but marriage—it acts in this way with you women; yes, that we know—you were married, and you said, "Now let us be faithful." Did you not say that? I am forgiving, though none think it. You have only to confess. If you will not,—oh!' He smote his face, groaning.

Carlo spoke a stern word in an undertone, counselling him to be gone.

'If you will not—what was she to do?' Barto cut the question to interrogate his strayed wits. 'Look at me, Countess Alessandra. I was in the prison. I heard that my Rosellina had a tight heart. She cried for her master, poor heathen, and I sprang out of the walls to her. There —there—she lay like a breathing board; a woman with a body like a coffin half alive; not an eye to show; nothing but a body and a whisper. She perished righteously, for she disobeyed. She acted without my orders: she dared to think! She will be damned, for she would have vengeance before she went. She glorified you over me—over Barto Rizzo. Oh! she shocked my soul. But she is dead, and I am her slave. Every word was of you. Take another head, Barto Rizzo: your old one was mad: she said that to my soul. She died blessing you above me. I saw the last bit of life go up from her mouth blessing you. It 's heard by this time in heaven, and it 's written. Then I have had two years of madness. If she is right, I was wrong; I was a devil of hell. I know there 's an eye given to dying creatures,

and she looked with it, and she said, the soul of Rinaldo Guidascarpi, her angel, was glorifying you; and she thanked the sticking of her heart, when she tried to stab you, poor fool!'

Carlo interrupted: 'Now go; you have said enough.'

'No, let him speak,' said Vittoria. She supposed that Barto was going to say that he had not given the order for her assassination. 'You do not wish me dead, signore?'

'Nothing that is not standing in my way, signora contessa,' said Barto; and his features blazed with a smile of happy self-justification. 'I have killed a sentinel this night: Providence placed him there. I wish for no death, but I punish, and—ah! the cursed sight of the woman who calls me mad for two years. She thrusts a bar of iron in an engine at work, and says, Work on! work on! Were you not a traitress? Countess Alessandra, were you not once a traitress? Oh! confess it; save my head. Reflect, dear lady! it 's cruel to make a man of a saintly sincerity look back—I count the months—seventeen months! to look back seventeen months, and see that his tongue was a clapper,—his will, his eyes, his ears, all about him, everything, stirred like a pot on the fire. I traced you. I saw your treachery. I said—I, *I* am her Day of Judgement. She shall look on me and perish, struck down by her own treachery. Were my senses false to me? I had lived in virtuous fidelity to my principles. None can accuse me. Why were my senses false, if my principles were true? I said you were a traitress. I saw it from the first. I had the divine contempt for women. My distrust of a woman was the eye of this brain, and I said—Follow her, dog her, find her out! I proved her false; but her devilish cunning deceived every other man in the world. Oh! let me bellow, for it 's me she proves the mass of corruption! To-morrow I die, and if I am mad now, what sort of a

curse is that? Now to-morrow is an hour—a laugh! But if I 've not been shot from a true bow—if I 've been a sham for two years—if my name, and nature, bones, brains, were all false things hunting a shadow, Countess Alessandra, see the misery of Barto Rizzo! Look at those two years, and say that I had my head. Answer me, as you love your husband: are you heart and soul with him in the fresh fight for Lombardy?'

He said this with a look penetrating and malignant, and then by a sudden flash pitifully entreating.

Carlo feared to provoke, revolted from the thought of slaying him. 'Yes, yes,' he interposed, 'my wife is heart and soul in it. Go.'

Barto looked from him to her with the eyes of a dog that awaits an order.

Vittoria gathered her strength, and said:

'I am not.'

'It is her answer!' Barto roared, and from deep dejection his whole countenance radiated. 'She says it —she might give the lie to a saint! I was never mad. I saw the spot, and put my finger on it, and not a madman can do that. My two years are my own. Mad now, for, see! I worship the creature. She is not heart and soul in it. She is not in it at all. She is a little woman, a lovely thing, a toy, a cantatrice. Joy to the big heart of Barto Rizzo! I am for Brescia!'

He flung his arm like a banner, and ran out.

Carlo laid his sword on a table. Vittoria's head was on his mother's bosom.

The hour was too full of imminent grief for either of the three to regard this scene as other than a gross intrusion ended.

'Why did you deny my words?' Carlo said coldly.

'I could not lie to make him wretched,' she replied in a low murmur.

'Do you know what that "I am for Brescia" means? He goes to stir the city before a soul is ready.'

'I warned you that I should speak the truth of myself to-night, dearest.'

'You should discern between speaking truth to a madman, and to a man.'

Vittoria did not lift her eyes, and Carlo beckoned to Violetta, with whom he left the room.

'He is angry,' Countess Ammiani murmured. 'My child, you cannot deal with men in a fever unless you learn to dissemble; and there is exemption for doing it, both in plain sense, and in our religion. If I could arrest him, I would speak boldly. It is, alas! vain to dream of that; and it is therefore an unkindness to cause him irritation. Carlo has given way to you by allowing you to be here when his friends assemble. He knows your intention to speak. He has done more than would have been permitted by my husband to me, though I too was well-beloved.'

Vittoria continued silent that her head might be cherished where it lay. She was roused from a stupor by hearing new voices. Laura's lips came pressing to her cheek. Colonel Corte, Agostino, Marco Sana, and Angelo Guidascarpi, saluted her. Angelo she kissed.

'That lady should be abed and asleep,' Corte was heard to say.

The remark passed without notice. Angelo talked apart with Vittoria. He had seen the dying of the woman whose hand had been checked in the act of striking by the very passion of animal hatred which raised it. He spoke of her affectionately, attesting to the fact that Barto Rizzo had not prompted her guilt. Vittoria moaned at a short outline that he gave of the last minutes between those two, in which her name was dreadfully and fatally, incomprehensibly prominent.

All were waiting impatiently for Carlo's return.

When he appeared he informed his mother that the Countess d'Isorella would remain in the house that night, and his mother passed out to her abhorred guest, who, for the time at least, could not be doing further mischief.

It was a meeting for the final disposition of things before the outbreak. Carlo had begun to speak when Corte drew his attention to the fact that ladies were present, at which Carlo put out his hand as if introducing them, and went on speaking.

'Your wife is here,' said Corte.

'My wife and Signora Piaveni,' Carlo rejoined. 'I have consented to my wife's particular wish to be present.'

'The Signora Piaveni's opinions are known: your wife's are not.'

'Countess Alessandra shares mine,' said Laura, rather tremulously.

Countess Ammiani at the same time returned and took Vittoria's hand and pressed it with force. Carlo looked at them both.

'I have to ask your excuses, gentlemen. My wife, my mother, and Signora Piaveni, have served the cause we worship sufficiently to claim a right—I am sorry to use such phrases; you understand my meaning. Permit them to remain. I have to tell you that Barto Rizzo has been here: he has started for Brescia. I should have had to kill him to stop him—a measure that I did not undertake.'

'Being your duty!' remarked Corte.

Agostino corrected him with a sarcasm.

'I cannot allow the presence of ladies to exclude a comment on manifest indifference,' said Corte. 'Pass on to the details, if you have any.'

'The details are these,' Carlo resumed, too proud to show a shade of self-command; 'my cousin Angelo leaves

Milan before morning. You, Colonel Corte, will be in Bergamo at noon to-morrow. Marco and Angelo will await my coming in Brescia, where we shall find Giulio and the rest. I join them at five on the following afternoon, and my arrival signals the revolt. We have decided that the news from the king's army is good.'

A perceptible shudder in Vittoria's frame at this concluding sentence caught Corte's eye.

'Are you dissatisfied with that arrangement?' he addressed her boldly.

'I am, Colonel Corte,' she replied. So simple was the answering tone of her voice that Corte had not a word.

'It is my husband who is going,' Vittoria spoke on steadily; 'him I am prepared to sacrifice, as I am myself. If he thinks it right to throw himself into Brescia, nothing is left for me but to thank him for having done me the honour to consult me. His will is firm. I trust to God that he is wise. I look on him now as one of many brave men whose lives belong to Italy, and if they all are misdirected and perish, we have no more; we are lost. The King is on the Ticino; the Chief is in Rome. I desire to entreat you to take counsel before you act in anticipation of the king's fortune. I see that it is a crushed life in Lombardy. In Rome there is one who can lead and govern. He has suffered and is calm. He calls to you to strengthen his hands. My prayer to you is to take counsel. I know the hour is late; but it is not too late for wisdom. Forgive me if I am not speaking humbly. Brescia is but Brescia; Rome is Italy. I have understood little of my country until these last days, though I have both talked and sung of her glories. I know that a deep duty binds you to Bergamo and to Brescia—poor Milan we must not think of. You are not personally pledged to Rome: yet Rome may have the greatest claims on you. The heart of our country is beginning

to beat there. Colonel Corte! Signor Marco! my Agostino! my cousin Angelo! it is not a woman asking for the safety of her husband, but one of the blood of Italy who begs to offer you her voice, without seeking to disturb your judgement.'

She ceased.

'Without seeking to disturb their judgement!' cried Laura. 'Why not, when the judgement is in error?'

To Laura's fiery temperament Vittoria's speech had been feebleness. She was insensible to that which the men felt conveyed to them by the absence of emotion in the language of a woman so sorrowfully placed. 'Wait,' she said, 'wait for the news from Carlo Alberto, if you determine to play at swords and guns in narrow streets.' She spoke long and vehemently, using irony, coarse and fine, with the eloquence which was her gift. In conclusion she apostrophized Colonel Corte as one who had loved him might have done. He was indeed that figure of indomitable strength to which her spirit, exhausted by intensity of passion, clung more than to any other on earth, though she did not love him, scarcely liked him.

Corte asked her curiously—for she had surprised and vexed his softer side—why she distinguished him with such remarkable phrases only to declare her contempt for him.

'It 's the flag whipping the flag-pole,' murmured Agostino; and he now spoke briefly in support of the expedition to Rome; or at least in favour of delay until the King of Sardinia had gained a battle. While he was speaking, Merthyr entered the room, and behind him a messenger who brought word that Bergamo had risen.

The men drew hurriedly together, and Countess Ammiani, Vittoria and Laura stood ready to leave them.

'You will give me five minutes?' Vittoria whispered to her husband, and he nodded.

'Merthyr,' she said, passing him, 'can I have your word that you will not go from me?'

Merthyr gave her his word after he had looked on her face.

'Send to me every two hours, that I may know you are near,' she added; 'do not fear waking me. Or, no, dear friend; why should I have any concealment from you? Be not a moment absent, if you would not have me fall to the ground a second time: follow me.'

Even as he hesitated, for he had urgent stuff to communicate to Carlo, he could see a dreadful whiteness rising on her face, darkening the circles of her eyes.

'It 's life or death, my dearest, and I am bound to live,' she said. Her voice sprang up from tears.

Merthyr turned and tried in vain to get a hearing among the excited, voluble men. They shook his hand, patted his shoulder, and counselled him to leave them. He obtained Carlo's promise that he would not quit the house without granting him an interview; after which he passed out to Vittoria, where Countess Ammiani and Laura sat weeping by the door.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE WIFE AND THE HUSBAND

When they were alone Merthyr said: 'I cannot give many minutes, not much time. I have to speak to your husband.'

She answered: 'Give me many minutes—much time. All other speaking is vain here.'

'It concerns his safety.'

'It will not save him.'

'But I have evidence that he is betrayed. His plans are known; a trap is set for him. If he moves, he walks into a pit.'

'You would talk reason, Merthyr,' Vittoria sighed. 'Talk it to me. I can listen; I thirst for it. I beat at the bars of a cage all day. When I saw you this afternoon, I looked on another life. It was too sudden, and I swooned. That was my only show of weakness. Since then you are the only strength I feel.'

'Have they all become Barto Rizzos?' Merthyr exclaimed.

'Beloved, I will open my mind to you,' said Vittoria. 'I am cowardly, and I thought I had such courage! To-night a poor mad creature has been here, who has oppressed me, I cannot say how long, with real fear—that I only understand now that I know the little ground I had for it. I am even pleased that one like Barto Rizzo should see me in a better light. I find the thought smiling in my heart when every other thing is utterly dark there. You have heard that Carlo goes to Brescia. When I was married, I lost sight of Italy, and everything but happiness. I suffer as I deserve for it now. I could have turned my husband from this black path; I preferred to dream and sing. I would not see—it was my pride that would not let me see his error. My cowardice would not let me wound him with a single suggestion. You say that he is betrayed. Then he is betrayed by the woman who has never been unintelligible to me. We were in Turin surrounded by intrigues, and there I thanked her so much for leaving me the days with my husband by Lake Orta that I did not seek to open his eyes to her. We came to Milan, and here I have been thanking her for the happy days in Turin. Carlo is no longer to blame if he will not listen to me. I have helped to teach him that I am no better than any of these Italian

women whom he despises. I spoke to him as his wife should do, at last. He feigned to think me jealous, and I too remember the words of the reproach, as if they had a meaning. Ah, my friend! I would say of nothing that it is impossible, except this task of recovering lost ground with one who is young. Experience of trouble has made me older than he. When he accused me of jealousy I could mention Countess d'Isorella's name no more. I confess to that. Yet I knew my husband feigned. I knew that he could not conceive the idea of jealousy existing in me, as little as I could imagine unfaithfulness in him. But my lips would not take her name! Wretched cowardice cannot go farther. I spoke of Rome. As often as I spoke, that name was enough to shake me off: he had but to utter it, and I became dumb. He did it to obtain peace; for no other cause. So, by degrees, I have learnt the fatal truth. He has trusted her, for she is very skilful; distrusting her, for she is treacherous. He has, therefore, believed excessively in his ability to make use of her, and to counteract her baseness. I saw his error from the first; and I went on dreaming and singing; and now this night has come!'

Vittoria shadowed her eyes.

'I will go to him at once,' said Merthyr.

'Yes; I am relieved. Go, dear friend,' she sobbed; 'you have given me tears, as I hoped. You will not turn him; had it been possible, could I have kept you from him so long? I know that you will not turn him from his purpose, for I know what a weight it is that presses him forward in that path. Do not imagine our love to be broken. He will convince you that it is not. He has the nature of an angel. He permitted me to speak before these men to-night—feeble thing that I am! It was a last effort. I might as well have tried to push a rock.'

She rose at a noise of voices in the hall below.

'They are going, Merthyr. See him now. There may be help in heaven; if one could think it! If help were given to this country—if help were only visible! The want of it makes us all without faith.'

'Hush! you may hear good news from Carlo Alberto in a few hours!' said Merthyr.

'Ask Laura; she has witnessed how he can be shattered,' Vittoria replied bitterly.

Merthyr pressed her fingers. He was met by Carlo on the stairs.

'Quick!' Carlo said; 'I have scarce a minute to spare. I have my adieux to make, and the tears have set in already. First, a request: you will promise to remain beside my wife; she will want more than her own strength.'

Such a request, coming from an Italian husband, was so great a proof of the noble character of his love and his knowledge of the woman he loved, that Merthyr took him in his arms and kissed him.

'Get it over quickly, dear good fellow,' Carlo murmured; 'you have something to tell me. Whatever it is, it 's air; but I 'll listen.'

They passed into a vacant room.

'You know you are betrayed,' Merthyr began.

'Not exactly that,' said Carlo, humming carelessly.

'Positively and absolutely. The Countess d'Isorella has sold your secrets.'

'I commend her to the profit she has made by it.'

'Do you play with your life?'

Carlo was about to answer in the tone he had assumed for the interview. He checked the laugh on his lips.

'She must have some regard for my life, such as it 's worth, since, to tell you the truth, she is in the house now, and came here to give me fair warning.'

'Then, you trust her.'

'I? Not a single woman in the world!—that is, for a conspiracy.'

It was an utterly fatuous piece of speech. Merthyr allowed it to slip, and studied him to see where he was vulnerable.

'She is in the house, you say. Will you cause her to come before me?'

'Curiously,' said Carlo, 'I kept her for some purpose of the sort. Will I? and have a scandal now? Oh! no. Let her sleep.'

Whether he spoke from noble-mindedness or indifference, Merthyr could not guess.

'I have a message from your friend Luciano. He sends you his love, in case he should be shot the first, and says that when Lombardy is free he hopes you will not forget old comrades who are in Rome.'

'Forget him! I would to God I could sit and talk of him for hours. Luciano! Luciano! He has no wife.'

Carlo spoke on hoarsely. 'Tell me what authority you have for charging Countess d'Isorella with . . . with whatever it may be.'

'A conversation between Countess Anna of Lenkenstein and a Major Nagen, in the Duchess of Graätli's house, was overheard by our Beppo. They spoke German. The rascal had a German sweetheart with him. She imprisoned him for some trespass, and had come stealing in to rescue him, when those two entered the room. Countess Anna detailed to Nagen the course of your recent plotting. She named the hour this morning when you are to start for Brescia. She stated what force you have, what arms you expect; she named you all.'

'Nagen—Nagen,' Carlo repeated; 'the man's unknown to me.'

'It 's sufficient that he is an Austrian officer.'

'Quite. She hates me, and she has reason, for she 's

aware that I mean to fight her lover, and choose my time. The blood of my friends is on that man's head.'

'I will finish what I have to say,' pursued Merthyr. 'When Beppo had related as much as he could make out from his sweetheart's translation, I went straight to the duchess. She is an Austrian, and a good and reasonable woman. She informed me that a letter addressed by Countess Anna to Countess d'Isorella fell into her hands this night. She burnt it unopened. I leave it to you to consider whether you have been betrayed and who has betrayed you. The secret was bought. Beppo himself caught the words, "from a mercenary Italian." The duchess tells me that Countess Anna is in the habit of alluding to Countess d'Isorella in those terms.'

Carlo stretched his arms like a man who cannot hide the yawning fit.

'I promised my wife five minutes, though we have had the worst of the parting over. Perhaps you will wait for me; I may have a word to say.'

He was absent for little more than the space named. When he returned, he was careful to hide his face. He locked the door, and leading Merthyr to an inner room, laid his watch on the table, and said: 'Now, friend, you will see that I have nothing to shrink from, for I am going to do execution upon myself, and before him whom I would, above all other men, have think well of me. My wife supposes that I am pledged to this Brescian business because I am insanely patriotic. If I might join Luciano to-morrow I would shout like a boy. I would be content to serve as the lowest in the ranks, if I might be with you all under the Chief. Rome crowns him, and Brescia is my bloody ditch, and it is deserved! When I was a little younger—I am a boy still, no doubt—I had the honour to be distinguished by a handsome woman; and when I grew a little older, I discovered by chance that she had

wit. The lady is the Countess Violetta d'Isorella. It is a grief to me to know that she is sordid: it hurts my vanity the more. Perhaps you begin to perceive that vanity governs me. The Signora Laura has not expressed her opinion on this subject with any reserve, but to Violetta belongs the merit of having seen it without waiting for the signs. First—it is a small matter, but you are English—let me assure you that my wife has had no rival. I have taunted her with jealousy when I knew that it was neither in her nature to feel it, nor in mine to give reason for it. No man who has a spark of his Maker in him could be unfaithful to such a woman. When Lombardy was crushed, we were in the dust. I fancy we none of us knew how miserably we had fallen—we, as men. The purest—I dare say, the bravest—marched to Rome. God bless my Luciano there! But I, sir, I, my friend, I, Merthyr, I said proudly that I would not abandon a beaten country: and I was admired for my devotion. The dear old poet, Agostino, praised me. It stopped his epigrams—during a certain time, at least. Colonel Corte admired me. Marco Sana, Giulio Bandinelli admired me. Vast numbers admired me. I need not add that I admired myself. I plunged into intrigues with princes, and priests, and republicans. A clever woman was at my elbow. In the midst of all this, my marriage: I had seven weeks of peace; and then I saw what I was. You feel that you are tired, when you want to go another way: and you feel that you have been mad when you want to undo your work. But I could not break the chains I had wrought, for I was a chief of followers. The men had come from exile, or they had refused to join the Roman enterprise:—they, in fact, had bound themselves to me; and that means I was irrevocably bound to them. I had an insult to wipe out: I refrained from doing it, sincerely, I may

tell you, on the ground that this admired life of mine was precious. I will heap no more clumsy irony on it: I can pity it. Do you see now how I stand? I know that I cannot rely on the king's luck or on the skill of his generals, or on the power of his army, or on the spirit in Lombardy: neither on men nor on angels. But I cannot draw back. I have set going a machine that 's merciless. From the day it began working, every moment has added to its force. Do not judge me by your English eyes:—other lands, other habits; other habits, other thoughts. And besides, if honour said nothing, simple humanity would preserve me from leaving my band to perish like a flock of sheep.'

He uttered this with a profound conviction of his quality as leader, that escaped the lurid play of self-inspection which characterized what he had previously spoken, and served singularly in bearing witness to the truth of his charge against himself.

'Useless!' he said, waving his hand at anticipated remonstrances. 'Look with the eyes of my country; not with your own, my friend. I am disgraced if I do not go out. My friends are disgraced if I do not head them in Brescia—sacrificed!—murdered!—how can I say what? Can I live under disgrace or remorse? The king stakes on his army; I on the king. Whether he fights and wins, or fights and loses, I go out. I have promised my men—promised them success, I believe!—God forgive me! Did you ever see a fated man before? None had plotted against me. I have woven my own web, and that 's the fatal thing. I have a wife, the sweetest woman of her time. Good-night to her! our parting is over.'

He glanced at his watch. 'Perhaps she will be at the door below. Her heart beats like mine just now. You wish to say that you think me betrayed, and therefore I

may draw back? Did you not hear that Bergamo has risen? The Brescians are up too by this time. Gallant Brescians! they never belie the proverb in their honour; and to die among them would be sweet if I had all my manhood about me. You would have me making a scene with Violetta.'

'Set the woman face to face with me!' cried Merthyr, sighting a gleam of hope.

Carlo smiled. 'Can she bear my burden though she be ten times guilty? Let her sleep. I have her here harmless for the night. The Brescians are up:—that 's an hour that has struck, and there 's no calling it to move a step in the rear. Brescia under the big Eastern hill which throws a cloak on it at sunrise! Brescia is always the eagle that looks over Lombardy! And Bergamo! you know the terraces of Bergamo. Aren't they like a morning sky? Dying there is not death; it 's flying into the dawn. You Romans envy us. Come, confess it; you envy us. You have no Alps, no crimson hills, nothing but old walls to look on while you fight. Farewell, Merthyr Powys. I hear my servant's foot outside. My horse is awaiting me saddled, a mile from the city. Perhaps I shall see my wife again at the door below, or in heaven. Addio! Kiss Luciano for me. Tell him that I knew myself as well as he did, before the end came. Enrico, Emilio, and the others—tell them I love them. I doubt if there will ever be but a ghost of me to fight beside them in Rome. And there 's no honour, Merthyr, in a ghost's fighting, because he 's shot-proof; so I won't say what the valiant disembodied *I* may do by-and-by.'

He held his hands out, with the light soft smile of one who asks forgiveness for flippant speech, and concluded firmly: 'I have talked enough, and you are the man of sense I thought you; for to give me advice is childish

when no power on earth could make me follow it. Addio! Kiss me.'

They embraced. Merthyr said no more than that he would place messengers on the road to Brescia to carry news of the king's army. His voice was thick, and when Carlo laughed at him, his sensations strangely reversed their situations.

There were two cloaked figures at different points in the descent of the stairs. These rose severally at Carlo's approach, took him to their bosoms, and kissed him in silence. They were his mother and Laura. A third crouched by the door of the courtyard, which was his wife.

Merthyr kept aloof until the heavy door rolled a long dull sound. Vittoria's head was shawled over. She stood where her husband had left her, groping for him with one hand, that closed tremblingly hard on Merthyr when he touched it. Not a word was uttered in the house.

CHAPTER XLV

SHOWS MANY PATHS CONVERGING TO THE END

Until daylight Merthyr sat by himself, trying to realize the progressive steps of the destiny which seemed like a visible hand upon Count Ammiani, that he might know it to be nothing else than Carlo's work. He sat in darkness in the room where Carlo had spoken, thinking of him as living and dead. The brilliant life in Carlo protested against a possible fatal tendency in his acts so irrevocable as to plunge him to destruction when his head was clear, his blood cool, and a choice lay open to him. That brilliant young life, that fine face, the tones of Carlo's voice, swept about Merthyr, accusing him of stupid fatalism.

Grief stopped his answer to the charge; but in his wise mind he knew Carlo to have surveyed things justly; and that the Fates are within us. Those which are the forces of the outer world are as shadows to the power we have created within us. He felt this because it was his gathered wisdom. Human compassion, and love for the unhappy youth, crushed it in his heart, and he marvelled how he could have been paralyzed when he had a chance of interceding. Can a man stay a torrent? But a noble and fair young life in peril will not allow our philosophy to liken it to things of nature. The downward course of a fall that takes many waters till it rushes irresistibly is not the course of any life. Yet it is true that our destiny is of our own weaving. Carlo's involvements cast him into extreme peril, almost certain death, unless he abjured his honour, dearer than a life made precious by love. Merthyr saw that it was not vanity, but honour; for Carlo stood pledged to lead a forlorn enterprise, the ripeness of his own scheming. In the imminent hour Carlo had recognized his position as Merthyr with the wisdom of years looked on it. That was what had paralyzed the older man, though he could not subsequently trace the cause. Thinking of the beauty of the youth, husband of the woman who was to his soul utterly an angel, Merthyr sat in the anguish of self-accusation, believing that some remonstrance, some inspired word, might have turned him, and half dreading to sound his own heart, as if an evil knowledge of his nature haunted it.

He rose up at last with a cry. The door opened, and Giacinta, Vittoria's maid, appeared, bearing a lamp. She had been sitting outside, waiting to hear him stir before she intruded. He touched her cheek kindly, and thought that one could do little better than die, if need were, in the service of such a people. She said that her mistress was kneeling. She wished to make coffee for him, and

Merthyr let her do it, knowing the comfort there is to a woman in ministering occupation of her hands. It was soon daylight. Beppo had not come back to the house.

'No one has left the house?' Merthyr asked.

'Not since——' she answered convulsively.

'The Countess d'Isorella is here?'

'Yes, signore.'

'Asleep?' he put the question mournfully, in remembrance of Carlo's 'Let her sleep!'

'Yes, signore; like the first night after confession.'

'She resides, I think, in the Corso Venezia. When she awakens, let her know that I request to have the honour of conducting her.'

'Yes, signore. Her carriage is still at the gates. The countess's horses are accustomed to stand.'

Merthyr knew this for a hint against his leaving, as well as against the lady's character.

'Let your mistress be assured that I shall on no account be long absent at any time.'

'Signore, I shall do so,' said Giacinta.

She brought him word soon after, that Countess d'Isorella was stirring. Merthyr met Violetta on the stairs.

'Can it be true?' she accosted him first.

'Count Ammiani has left for Brescia,' he replied.

'In spite of my warning?'

Merthyr gave space for her to pass into the room. She appeared undecided, saying that she had a dismal apprehension of her not having dismissed her coachman over-night.

'In spite of my warning,' she murmured again, 'he has really gone? Surely I cannot have slept more than three hours.'

'It was Count Ammiani's wish that you should enjoy

your full sleep undisturbed in his house,' said Merthyr. 'As regards your warning to him, he has left Milan perfectly convinced of the gravity of a warning that comes from you.'

Violetta shrugged lightly. 'Then all we have to do is to pray for the success of Carlo Alberto.'

'Oh! pardon me, countess,' Merthyr rejoined, 'prayers may be useful, but you at least have something to do besides.'

His eyes caught hers firmly as they were letting a wild look of interrogation fall on him, and he continued with perfect courtesy, 'You will accompany me to see Countess Anna of Lenkenstein. You have great influence, madame. It is not Count Ammiani's request; for, as I informed you, it was his wish that you should enjoy your repose. The request is mine, because his life is dear to me. Nagen, I think, is the name of the Austrian officer who has started for Brescia.'

She had in self-defence to express surprise while he spoke, which compelled her to meet his mastering sight and submit to a struggle of vision sufficient to show him that he had hit a sort of guilty consciousness. Otherwise she was not discomposed, and with marvellous sagacity she accepted the forbearance he assumed, not affecting innocence to challenge it, as silly criminals always do when they are exposed, but answering quite in the tone of innocence, and so throwing the burden by an appearance of mutual consent on some unnamed third person.

'Certainly; let us go to Countess Anna of Lenkenstein, if you think fit. I have to rely on your judgement. I quite abjure my own. If I have to plead for anything, I am going before a woman, remember.'

'I do not forget it,' said Merthyr.

'The expedition to Brescia may be unfortunate,' she resumed hurriedly; 'I wish it had not been undertaken.

At any rate, it rescues Count Ammiani from an expedition to Rome, and his slavish devotion to that priest-hating man whom he calls, or called, his Chief. At Brescia he is not outraging the head of our religion. That is a gain.'

'A gain for him in the next world?' said Merthyr. 'I believe that Countess Anna of Lenkenstein is also a fervent Catholic; is she not?'

'I trust so.'

'On behalf of her peace of mind, I trust so, too. In that case, she also must be a sound sleeper.'

'We shall have to awaken her. What excuse—what am I to say to her?'

'I beg you to wait for the occasion, Countess d'Isorella. The words will come.'

Violetta bit her lip. She had consented to this extraordinary step in an amazement. As she contemplated it now, it seemed worse than a partial confession and an appeal to his generosity. She broke out in pity for her horses, in dread of her coachman, declaring that it was impossible for her to give him the order to drive her anywhere but home.

'With your permission, countess, I will undertake to give him the order,' said Merthyr.

'But have you no compassion, Signor Powys? and you are an Englishman! I thought that Englishmen were excessively compassionate with horses.'

'They have been known to kill them in the service of their friends, nevertheless.'

'Well!'—Violetta had recourse to the expression of her shoulders—'and I am really to see Countess Anna?'

'In my presence.'

'Oh! that cannot be. Pardon me; it is impossible. She will decline the scene. I say it with the utmost sincerity: I know that she will refuse.'

'Then, countess,' Merthyr's face grew hard, 'if I am

not to be in your company to prompt you, allow me to instruct you beforehand.'

Violetta looked at him eagerly, as one looks for tidings, with an involuntary beseeching quiver of the strained eyelids.

'No irony!' she said, fearing horribly that he was about to throw off the mask of irony.

This desperate effort of her wits at the crisis succeeded.

Merthyr, not knowing what design he had, hopeless of any definite end in tormenting the woman, and never having it in his mind merely to punish, was diverted by the exclamation to speak ironically. 'You can tell Countess Anna that it is only her temporal sovereign who is attacked, and that therefore——' he could not continue.

'Some affection?' he murmured, in intense grief.

His manly forbearance touched her whose moral wit was too blunt to apprehend the contempt in it.

'Much affection—much!' Violetta exclaimed. 'I have a deep affection for Count Ammiani; an old friendship. Believe me! believe me! I came here last night to save him. Anything on earth that I can do, I will do—on my honour; and do not smile at that—I have never pledged it without fulfilling the oath. I will not sleep while I can aid in preserving him. He shall know that I am not the base person he has conceived me to be. You, Signor Powys, are not a man to paint all women black that are a little less than celestial—are you? I am told it is a trick with your countrymen; and they have a poet who knew us! I entreat you to confide in me. I am at present quite unaware that Count Ammiani runs particular —I mean personal—danger. He is in danger, of course; every one can see it. But, on my honour—and never in my life have I spoken so earnestly, my friends would hardly recognize me—I declare to you on my faith as a Christian lady, I am ignorant of any plot against him.

I can take a Cross and kiss it, like a peasant, and swear to you by the Madonna that I know nothing of it.'

She corrected her ardour, half-exulting in finding herself carried so far and so swimmingly on a tide of truth, half wondering whether the flowering beauty of her face in excitement had struck his sensibility. He was cold and speculative.

'Ah!' she said, 'if I were to ask my compatriots to put faith in a woman's pure friendship for a man, I should know the answer; but you, Signor Powys, who have shown us that a man is capable of the purest friendship for a woman, should believe me.'

He led her down to the gates, where her coachman sat muffled in a three-quarter sleep. The word was given to drive to her own house; rejoiced by which she called his attention deploringly to the condition of her horses, requesting him to say whether he could imagine them the best English, and confessing with regret, that she killed three sets a year—loved them well, notwithstanding. Merthyr saw enough of her to feel that she was one of the weak creatures who are strong through our greater weakness; and, either by intuition or quick wit, too lively and too subtle to be caught by simple suspicion. She even divined that reflection might tell him she had evaded him by an artifice—a piece of gross cajolery; and said, laughing: 'Concerning friendship, I could offer it to a boy, like Carlo Ammiani; not to you, Signor Powys. I know that I must check a youth, and I am on my guard. I should be eternally tormented to discover whether your armour was proof.'

'I dare say that a lady who has those torments would soon be able to make them mine,' said Merthyr.

'You could not pay a fairer compliment to some one else,' she remarked. In truth, the candid personal avowal seemed to her to hold up Vittoria's sacred honour

in a crystal, and the more she thought of it, the more she respected him, for his shrewd intelligence, if not for his sincerity; but on the whole she fancied him a loyal friend, not solely a clever maker of phrases; and she was pleased with herself for thinking such a matter possible, in spite of her education.

'I do most solemnly hope that you may not have to sustain Countess Alessandra under any affliction whatsoever,' she said at parting.

Violetta had escaped an exposure—a rank and naked accusation of her character and deeds. She feared nothing but that, being quite indifferent to opinion; a woman who would not have thought it preternaturally sad to have to walk as a penitent in the streets, with the provision of a very thick veil to cover her. She had escaped, but the moment she felt herself free, she was surprised by a sharp twinge of remorse. She summoned her maid to undress her, and smelt her favourite perfume, and lay in her bed, to complete her period of rest, closing her eyes there with a child's faith in pillows. Flying lights and blood-blotches rushed within a span of her forehead. She met this symptom promptly with a medical receipt; yet she had no sleep; nor would coffee give her sleep. She shrank from opium as deleterious to the constitution, and her mind settled on music as the remedy.

Some time after her craving for it had commenced, an Austrian foot regiment, marching to the drum, passed under her windows. The fife is a merry instrument; fife and drum colour the images of battle gaily; but the dull ringing Austrian step-drum, beating unaccompanied, strikes the mind with the real nature of battles, as the salt smell of powder strikes it, and more in horror, more as a child's imagination realizes bloodshed, where the scene is a rolling heaven, black and red on all sides, with pitiable men moving up to the mouth of butchery, the insufferable

flashes, the dark illumination of red, red of black, like a vision of the shadows Life and Death in a shadow-fight over the dear men still living. Sensitive minds may be excited by a small stimulant to see such pictures. This regimental drum is like a song of the flat-headed savage in man. It has no rise or fall, but leads to the bloody business with an unvarying note, and a savage's dance in the middle of the rhythm. Violetta listened to it until her heart quickened with alarm lest she should be going to have a fever. She thought of Carlo Ammiani, and of the name of Nagen; she had seen him at the Lenkensteins. Her instant supposition was that Anna had perhaps paid heavily for the secret of Carlo's movements on purpose to place Major Nagen on the Brescian high-road to capture him. Capture meant a long imprisonment, if not execution. Partly for the sake of getting peace of mind—for she was shocked by her temporary inability to command repose—but with some hope of convincing Carlo that she strove to be of use to him, she sent for the spy Luigi, and at a cost of two hundred and twenty Austrian florins, obtained his promise upon oath to follow Count Ammiani into Brescia, if necessary, and deliver to him a letter she had written, wherein Nagen's name was mentioned, and Carlo was advised to avoid personal risks; the letter hinted that he might have incurred a private enmity, and he had better keep among his friends. She knew the writing of this letter to be the foolishest thing she had ever done. Two hundred and twenty florins—the man originally stipulated to have three hundred—was a large sum to pay for postage. However, sacrifices must now and then be made for friendship, and for sleep. When she had paid half the money, her mind was relieved, and she had the slumber which preserves beauty. Luigi was to be paid the other half on his return. 'He may never return,' she thought, while

graciously dismissing him. The deduction by mental arithmetic of the two hundred and twenty, or the one hundred and ten florins, from the large amount Countess Anna was bound to pay her in turn, annoyed her, though she knew it was a trifle. For this lady, Milan, Turin, and Paris sighed deeply.

When he had left Violetta at her house in the Corso, Merthyr walked briskly for exercise, knowing that he would have need of his health and strength. He wanted a sight of Alps to wash out the image of the woman from his mind, and passed the old Marshal's habitation fronting the Gardens, wishing that he stood in the field against the fine old warrior, for whom he had a liking. Near the walls he discovered Beppo sitting pensively with his head between his two fists. Beppo had not seen Count Ammiani, but he had seen Barto Rizzo, and pointing to the walls, said that Barto had dropped down there. He had met him hurrying in the Corso Francesco. Barto took him to the house of Sarpo, the bookseller, who possessed a small printing-press. Beppo described vividly, with his usual vivacity of illustration, the stupefaction of the man at the apparition of his tormentor, whom he thought fast in prison; and how Barto had compelled him to print a proclamation to the Piedmontese, Lombards, and Venetians, setting forth that a battle had been fought South of the Ticino, and that Carlo Alberto was advancing on Milan, signed with the name of the Piedmontese Pole in command of the King's army. A second, framed as an order of the day, spoke of victory and the planting of the green, white and red banner on the Adige, and forward to the Isonzo.

'I can hear nothing of Carlo Alberto's victory,' Beppo said; 'no one has heard of it. Barto told us how the battle was fought, and the name of the young lieutenant who discovered the enemy's flank march, and got the

artillery down on him, and pounded him so that—signore, it 's amazing! I 'm ready to cry, and laugh, and howl!—fifteen thousand men capitulated in a heap!'

'Don't you know you 've been listening to a madman?' said Merthyr, irritated, and thoroughly angered to see Beppo's opposition to that view.

'Signore, Barto described the whole battle. It began at five o'clock in the morning.'

'When it was dark!'

'Yes; *when* it was dark. He said so. And we sent up rockets, and caught the enemy coming on, and the cavalry of Alessandria fell upon two batteries of field guns and carried them off, and Colonel Romboni was shot in his back, and cries he, "Best give up the ghost if you 're hit in the rear. Evviva l'Italia!"'

'A Piedmontese colonel, you fool! he would have shouted "Viva Carlo Alberto!"' said Merthyr, now critically disgusted with the tale, and refusing to hear more. Two hours later, he despatched Beppo to Carlo in Brescia, warning him that for some insane purpose these two proclamations had been printed by Barto Rizzo, and that they were false.

It was early on the morning of a second day, before sunrise, when Vittoria sent for Merthyr to conduct her to the cathedral. 'There has been a battle,' she said. Her lips hardly joined to frame the syllables in speech. Merthyr refrained from asking where she had heard of the battle. As soon as the Duomo doors were open, he led her in and left her standing shrinking under the great vault with her neck fearfully drawn on her shoulders, as one sees birds under thunder. He thought that she was losing courage. Choosing to go out on the steps rather than look on her, he was struck by the sight of two horsemen, who proved to be Austrian officers, rattling at racing speed past the Duomo up the Corso. The sight of them

made it seem possible that a battle had been fought. As soon as he was free, Merthyr went to the Duchess of Graätli, from whom he had the news of Novara. The officers he had seen were Prince Radocky and Lieutenant Wilfrid Pierson, the old Marshal's emissaries of victory. They had made a bet on the bloody field about reaching Milan first, and the duchess affected to be full of the humour of this bet in order to conceal her exultation. The Lenkensteins called on her; the Countess of Lenkenstein, Anna, and Lena; and they were less considerate, and drew their joy openly from the source of his misery —a dreadful house for Merthyr to remain in, but he hoped to see Wilfrid, having heard the duchess rally Lena concerning the deeds of the white umbrella, which, Lena said, was pierced with balls, and had been preserved for her. 'The dear foolish fellow insisted on marching right into the midst of the enemy with his absurd white umbrella; and wherever there was danger the men were seen following it. Prince Radocky told me the whole army was laughing. How he escaped death was a miracle!' She spoke unaffectedly of her admiration for the owner, and as Wilfrid came in she gave him brilliant eyes. He shook Merthyr's hand without looking at him. The ladies would talk of nothing but the battle, so he went up to Merthyr, and under pretext of an eager desire for English news, drew him away.

'Her husband was not there? not at Novara, I mean?' he said.

'He 's at Brescia,' said Merthyr.

'Well, thank goodness he didn't stand in those ranks!' Wilfrid murmured, puffing thoughtfully over the picture they presented to his memory.

Merthyr then tried to hint to him that he had a sort of dull suspicion of Carlo's being in personal danger, but of what kind he could not say. He mentioned Weisspriess

by name; and Nagen; and Countess Anna. Wilfrid said, 'I 'll find out if there 's anything, only don't be fancying it. The man 's in a bad hole at Brescia. Weisspriess, I believe, is at Verona. He 's an honourable fellow. The utmost he would do would be to demand a duel; and I 'm sure he 's heartily sick of that work. Besides, he and Countess Anna have quarrelled. Meet me;—by the way, you and I mustn't be seen meeting, I suppose. The duchess is neutral ground. Come here to-night. And don't talk of me, but say that a friend asks how she is, and hopes—the best things you can say for me. I must go up to their confounded chatter again. Tell her there 's no fear, none whatever. You all hate us, naturally; but you know that Austrian officers are gentlemen. Don't speak my name to her just yet. Unless, of course, she should happen to allude to me, which is unlikely. I had a dismal idea that her husband was at Novara.'

The tender-hearted duchess sent a message to Vittoria, bidding her not to forget that she had promised her at Meran to 'love her always.'

'And tell her,' she said to Merthyr, 'that I do not think I shall have my rooms open for the concert to-morrow night. I prefer to let Antonio-Pericles go mad. She will not surely consider that she is bound by her promise to him? He drags poor Irma from place to place to make sure the miserable child is not plotting to destroy his concert, as that man Sarpo did. Irma is half dead, and hasn't the courage to offend him. She declares she depends upon him for her English reputation. She has already caught a violent cold, and her sneezing is frightful. I have never seen so abject a creature. I have no compassion at the sight of her.'

That night Merthyr heard from Wilfrid that a plot against Carlo Ammiani did exist. He repeated things he

had heard pass between Countess d'Isorella and Irma in the chamber of Pericles before the late battle. Modestly confessing that he was 'for some reasons' in high favour with Countess Lena, he added that after a long struggle he had brought her to confess that her sister had sworn to have Countess Alessandra Ammiani begging at her feet.

By mutual consent they went to consult the duchess. She repelled the notion of Austrian women conspiring. 'An Austrian noble lady—do you think it possible that she would act secretly to serve a private hatred? Surely I may ask you, for my sake, to think better of us?'

Merthyr showed her an opening to his ground by suggesting that Anna's antipathy to Vittoria might spring more from a patriotic than a private source.

'Oh! I will certainly make inquiries, if only to save Anna's reputation with her enemies,' the duchess answered rather proudly.

It would have been a Novara to Pericles if Vittoria had refused to sing. He held the pecuniarily-embarrassed duchess sufficiently in his power to command a concert at her house; his argument to those who pressed him to spare Vittoria in a season of grief running seriously, with visible contempt of their intellects, thus: 'A great voice is an ocean. You cannot drain it with forty dozen opera-hats. It is something found—an addition to the wealth of this life. Shall we not enjoy what we find? You do not wear out a picture by looking at it; likewise you do not wear out a voice by listening to it. A bird has wings;—here is a voice. Why were they given? I should say, to go into the air. Ah; but not if grandmother is ill. What is a grandmother to the wings and the voice? If to sing would kill,—yes, then let the puny thing be silent! But Sandra Belloni has a soul that has not a husband—except her Art. Her body is husbanded;

but her soul is above her body. You would treat it as below. Art is her soul's husband! Besides, I have her promise. She is a girl who will go up to a loaded gun's muzzle if she gives her word. And besides, her husband may be shot to-morrow. So, all she sings now is clear gain.'

Vittoria sent word to him that she would sing.

In the meantime a change had come upon Countess Anna. Weisspriess, her hero, appeared at her brother's house, fresh from the field of Novara, whither he had hurried from Verona on a bare pretext, that was a breach of military discipline requiring friendly interposition in high quarters. Unable to obtain an audience with Count Lenkenstein, he remained in the hall, hoping for things which he affected to care nothing for; and so it chanced that he saw Lena, who was mindful that her sister had suffered much from passive jealousy when Wilfrid returned from the glorious field, and led him to Anna, that she also might rejoice in a hero. Weisspriess did not refrain from declaring on the way that he would rather charge against a battery. Some time after, Anna lay in Lena's arms, sobbing out one of the wildest confessions ever made by woman:—she adored Weisspriess; she hated Nagen; but was miserably bound to the man she hated. 'Oh! now I know what love is.' She repeated this with transparent enjoyment of the opposing sensations by whose shock the knowledge was revealed to her.

'How can you be bound to Major Nagen?' asked Lena.

'Oh! why? except that I have been possessed by devils,' Anna moaned. 'Living among these Italians has distempered my blood.' She exclaimed that she was lost.

'In what way can you be lost?' said Lena.

'I have squandered more than half that I possess. I

am almost a beggar. I am no longer the wealthy Countess Anna. I am much poorer than any one of us.'

'But Major Weisspriess is a man of honour, and if he loves you——'

'Yes; he loves me! he loves me! or would he come to me after I have sent him against a dozen swords? But he is poor; he must, must marry a wealthy woman. I used to hate him because I thought he had his eye on money. I love him for it now. He deserves wealth; he is a matchless hero. He is more than the first swordsman of our army; he is a knightly man. Oh my soul Johann!' She very soon fell to raving. Lena was implored by her to give her hand to Weisspriess in reward for his heroism—'For you are rich,' Anna said; 'you will not have to go to him feeling that you have made him face death a dozen times for your sake, and that you thank him and reward him by being a whimpering beggar in his arms. Do, dearest! Will you? Will you, to please me, marry Johann? He is not unworthy of you.' And more of this hysterical hypocrisy, which brought on fits of weeping. 'I have lived among these savages till I have ceased to be human—forgotten everything but my religion,' she said. 'I wanted Weisspriess to show them that they dared not stand up against a man of us, and to tame the snarling curs. He did. He is brave. He did as much as a man could do, but I was unappeasable. They seem to have bitten me till I had a devouring hunger to humiliate them. Lena, will you believe that I have no hate for Carlo Ammiani or the woman he has married? None! and yet, what have I done!' Anna smote her forehead. 'They are nothing but little dots on a field for me. I don't care whether they live or die. It 's like a thing done in sleep.'

'I want to know what you have done,' said Lena caressingly.

'You at least will try to reward our truest hero, and make up to him for your sister's unkindness, will you not?' Anna replied with a cajolery wonderfully like a sincere expression of her wishes. 'He will be a good husband. He has proved it by having been so faithful a—a lover. So you may be sure of him. And when he is yours, do not let him fight again, Lena, for I have a sickening presentiment that his next duel is his last.'

'Tell me,' Lena entreated her, 'pray tell me what horrible thing you have done to prevent your marrying him.'

'With their pride and their laughter,' Anna made answer; 'the fools! were they to sting us perpetually and not suffer for it? That woman, the Countess Alessandra, as she 's now called—have you forgotten that she helped our Paul's assassin to escape? was she not eternally plotting against Austria? And I say that I love Austria. I love my country; I plot for my country. She and her husband plot, and I plot to thwart them. I have ruined myself in doing it. Oh, my heart! why has it commenced beating again? Why did Weisspriess come here? He offended me. He refused to do my orders, and left me empty-handed, and if he suffers too,' Anna relieved a hard look with a smile of melancholy, 'I hope he will not; I cannot say more.'

'And I 'm to console him if he does?' said Lena.

'At least, I shall be out of the way,' said Anna. 'I have still money enough to make me welcome in a convent.'

'I am to marry him?' Lena persisted, and half induced Anna to act a feeble part, composed of sobs and kisses and full confession of her plight. Anna broke from her in time to leave what she had stated of herself vague and self-justificatory, so that she kept her pride, and could forgive, as she was ready to do even so far as to

ask forgiveness in turn, when with her awakened enamoured heart she heard Vittoria sing at the concert of Pericles. Countess Alessandra's divine gift, which she would not withhold, though in a misery of apprehension; her grave eyes, which none could accuse of coldness, though they showed no emotion; her simple noble manner that seemed to lift her up among the forces threatening her; these expressions of a superior soul moved Anna under the influence of the incomparable voice to pass over envious contrasts, and feel the voice and the nature were one in that bosom. Could it be the same as the accursed woman who had stood before her at Meran? She could hardly frame the question, but she had the thought sufficiently firmly to save her dignity; she was affected by very strong emotion when Vittoria's singing ended, and nothing but the revival of the recollection of her old contempt preserved her from an impetuous desire to take the singer by the hand and have all clear between them; for they were now of equal rank to tolerating eyes. 'But she has no religious warmth!' Anna reflected with a glow of satisfaction. The concert was broken up by Laura Piaveni. She said out loud that the presence of Major Weisspriess was intolerable to the Countess Alessandra. It happened that Weisspriess entered the room while Laura sat studying the effect produced by her countrywoman's voice on the thick eyelids of Austrian Anna; and Laura, seeing their enemy ready to weep in acknowledgement of their power, scorned the power which could never win freedom, and broke up the sitting, citing the offence of the presence of Weisspriess for a pretext. The incident threw Anna back upon her old vindictiveness. It caused an unpleasant commotion in the duchess's saloon. Count Serabiglione was present, and ran round to Weisspriess, apologizing for his daughter's behaviour. 'Do you think I can't

deal with your women as well as your men, you ass?' said Weisspriess, enraged by the scandal of the scene. He was overheard by Count Karl Lenkenstein, who took him to task sharply for his rough speech; but Anna supported her lover, and they joined hands publicly. Anna went home prostrated with despair. 'What conscience is in me that I should wish one of my Kaiser's officers killed?' she cried enigmatically to Lena. 'But I must have freedom. Oh! to be free. I am chained to my enemy, and God blesses that woman. He makes her weep, but he blesses her, for her body is free, and mine,—the thought of mine sets flames creeping up my limbs as if I were tied to the stake. Losing a husband you love —what is that to taking a husband you hate?' Still Lena could get no plain confession from her, for Anna clung to self-justification, and felt it abandoning her, and her soul fluttering in a black gulf when she opened her mouth to disburden herself.

There came tidings of the bombardment of Brescia—one of the historic deeds of infamy. Many officers of the Imperial army perceived the shame which it cast upon their colours, even in those intemperate hours, and Karl Lenkenstein assumed the liberty of private friendship to go complaining to the old Marshal, who was too true a soldier to condemn a soldier in action, however strong his disapproval of proceedings. The liberty assumed by Karl was excessive; he spoke out in the midst of General officers as if his views were shared by them and the Marshal; and his error was soon corrected; one after another reproached him, until the Marshal, pitying his condition, sent him into his writing-closet, where he lectured the youth on military discipline. It chanced that there followed between them a question upon what the General in command at Brescia would do with his prisoners; and hearing that they were subject to the

rigours of a court-martial, and if adjudged guilty, would forthwith summarily be shot, Karl ventured to ask grace for Vittoria's husband. He succeeded finally in obtaining his kind old Chief's promise that Count Ammiani should be tried in Milan, and as the bearer of a paper to that effect, he called on his sisters to get them or Wilfrid to convey word to Vittoria of her husband's probable safety. He found Anna in a swoon, and Lena and the duchess bending over her. The duchess's chasseur Jacob Baumwalder Feckelwitz had been returning from Meran, when on the Brescian high-road he met the spy Luigi, and acting promptly under the idea that Luigi was always a pestilential conductor of detestable correspondence, he attacked him, overthrew him, and ransacked him, and bore the fruit of his sagacious exertions to his mistress in Milan; it was Violetta d'Isorella's letter to Carlo Ammiani. 'I have read it,' the duchess said; 'contrary to my habits when letters are not addressed to me. I bring it open to your sister Anna. She catches sight of one or two names and falls down in the state in which you see her.'

'Leave her to me,' said Karl.

He succeeded in extracting from Anna hints of the fact that she had paid a large sum of her own money to Countess d'Isorella for secrets connected with the Bergamasc and Brescian rising. 'We were under a mutual oath to be silent, but if one has broken it the other cannot; so I confess it to you, dearest good brother. I did this for my country at my personal sacrifice.'

Karl believed that he had a sister magnificent in soul. She was glad to have deluded him, but she could not endure his praises, which painted to her imagination all that she might have been if she had not dashed her patriotism with the low cravings of vengeance, making herself like some abhorrent mediæval grotesque, com-

posed of eagle and reptile. She was most eager in entreating him to save Count Ammiani's life. Carlo, she said, was their enemy, but he had been their friend, and she declared with singular earnestness that she should never again sleep or hold up her head, if he were slain or captured.

'My Anna is justified by me in everything she has done,' Karl said to the duchess.

'In that case,' the duchess replied, 'I have only to differ with her to feel your sword's point at my breast.'

'I should certainly challenge the man who doubted her,' said Karl.

The duchess laughed with a scornful melancholy.

On the steps of the door where his horse stood saddled, he met Wilfrid, and from this promised brother-in-law received matter for the challenge. Wilfrid excitedly accused Anna of the guilt of a conspiracy to cause the destruction of Count Ammiani. In the heat of his admiration for his sister, Karl struck him on the cheek with his glove, and called him a name by which he had passed during the days of his disgrace, signifying one who plays with two parties. Lena's maid heard them arrange to meet within an hour, and she having been a witness of the altercation, ran to her mistress in advance of Wilfrid, and so worked on Lena's terrors on behalf of her betrothed and her brother, that Lena dropped at Anna's feet telling her all that she had gathered and guessed in verification of Wilfrid's charge, and imploring her to confess the truth. Anna, though she saw her concealment pierced, could not voluntarily forego her brother's expressed admiration of her, and clung to the tatters of secresy. After a brief horrid hesitation, she chose to face Wilfrid. This interview began with lively recriminations, and was resulting in nothing—for Anna refused to be shaken by his statement that the Countess

d'Isorella had betrayed her, and perceived that she was listening to suspicions only—when, to give his accusation force, Wilfrid said that Brescia had surrendered and that Count Ammiani had escaped.

'And I thank God for it!' Anna exclaimed, and with straight frowning eyes, demanded the refutation of her sincerity.

'Count Ammiani and his men have five hours' grace ahead of Major Nagen and half a regiment,' said Wilfrid.

At this she gasped; she had risen her breath to deny or defy, and hung on the top of it without a voice.

'Tell us—say, but do say—confess that you know Nagen to be a name of mischief,' Lena prayed her.

'I will say anything to prevent my brother from running into danger,' Anna rejoined.

'She is most foully accused by one whom we permitted to aspire to be of our own family,' said Karl.

'Yet you, Karl, have always been the first to declare her revengeful,' Lena turned to him.

'Help, Karl, help me,' said Anna.

'Yes!' cried her sister; 'there you stand, and ask for help, meanest of women! Do you think these men are not in earnest? Karl is to help you, and you will not speak a word to save him from a grave before night, or me from a lover all of blood.'

'Am I to be the sacrifice?' said Anna.

'Whatever you call it, Wilfrid has spoken truth of you, and to none but members of our family; and he had a right to say it, and you are bound now to acknowledge it.'

'I acknowledge that I love and serve my country, Lena.'

'Not with a pure heart: you can't forgive. Insult or a wrong makes a madwoman of you. Confess, Anna! You know well that you can't kneel to a priest's ear, for you've stopped your conscience. You have pledged

yourself to misery to satisfy a spite, and you have not the courage to ask for——' Lena broke her speech like one whose wits have been kindled. 'Yes, Karl,' she resumed; 'Anna begged you to help her. You will. Take her aside and save her from being miserable for ever. You do mean to fight my Wilfrid?'

'I am certainly determined to bring him to repentance —leaving him the option of the way,' said Karl.

Lena took her sullen sister by the arm.

'Anna, will you let these two men go to slaughter? Look at them; they are both our brothers. One is dearer than a brother to me, and, oh God! I have known what it is to half-lose him. You to lose a lover and have to go bound by a wretched oath to be the wife of a detestable short-sighted husband! Oh, what an abominable folly!'

This epithet, 'short-sighted,' curiously forced in by Lena, was like a shock of the very image of Nagen's needle features thrust against Anna's eyes; the spasm of revulsion in her frame was too quick for her habitual self-control.

At that juncture Weisspriess opened the door, and Anna's eyes met his.

'You don't spare me,' she murmured to Lena.

Her voice trembled, and Wilfrid bent his head near her, pressing her hand, and said, 'Not only I, but Countess Alessandra Ammiani exonerates you from blame. As she loves her country, you love yours. My words to Karl were an exaggeration of what I know and think. Only tell me this;—if Nagen captures Count Ammiani, how is he likely to deal with him?'

'How can I inform you?' Anna replied coldly; but she reflected in a fire of terror. She had given Nagen the prompting of a hundred angry exclamations in the days of her fever of hatred; she had nevertheless forgotten

their parting words; that is, she had forgotten her mood when he started for Brescia, and the nature of the last instructions she had given him. Revolting from the thought of execution being done upon Count Ammiani, as one quickly springing out of fever dreams, all her white face went into hard little lines, like the withered snow which wears away in frost. 'Yes,' she said; and again, 'Yes,' to something Weisspriess whispered in her ear, she knew not clearly what. Weisspriess told Wilfrid that he would wait below. As he quitted the room, the duchess entered, and went up to Anna. 'My good soul,' she said, 'you have, I trust, listened to Major Weisspriess. Oh, Anna! you wanted revenge. Now take it, as becomes a high-born woman; and let your enemy come to your feet, and don't spurn her when she is there. Must I inform you that I have been to Countess d'Isorella myself with a man who can compel her to speak? But Anna von Lenkenstein is not base like that Italian. Let them think of you as they will, I believe you to have a great heart. I am sure you will not allow personal sentiment to sully your devotion to our country. Show them that our Austrian faces can be bright; and meet her whom you call your enemy; you cannot fly. You must see her—or you betray yourself. The poor creature's husband is in danger of capture or death.'

While the duchess's stern underbreath ran on hurriedly, convincing Anna that she had, with no further warning, to fall back upon her uttermost strength—the name of Countess Alessandra Ammiani was called at the door. Instinctively the others left a path between Vittoria and Anna. It was one of the moments when the adoption of a decisive course says more in vindication of conduct than long speeches. Anna felt that she was on her trial. For the first time since she had looked on this woman she noticed the soft splendour of Vittoria's

eyes, and the harmony of her whole figure; nor was the black dress of protesting Italian mourning any longer offensive in her sight, but on a sudden pitiful, for Anna thought: 'It may at this very hour be for her husband, and she not knowing it.' And with that she had a vision under her eyelids of Nagen like a shadowy devil in pursuit of men flying, and striking herself and Vittoria worse than dead in one blow levelled at Carlo Ammiani. A sense of supernatural horror chilled her blood when she considered again, facing her enemy, that their mutual happiness was by her own act involved in the fate of one life. She stepped farther than the half-way to greet her visitor, whose hands she took. Before a word was uttered between them, she turned to her brother, and with a clear voice said:

'Karl, the Countess Alessandra's husband, our old friend Carlo Ammiani, may need succour in his flight. Try to cross it; or better, get among those who are pursuing him, and don't delay one minute. You understand me.'

Count Karl bowed his head, bitterly humbled.

Anna's eyes seemed to interrogate Vittoria, 'Can I do more?' but her own heart answered her.

Inveterate when following up her passion for vengeance, she was fanatical in responding to the suggestions of remorse.

'Stay; I will despatch Major Weisspriess in my own name,' she said. 'He is a trusty messenger, and he knows those mountains. Whoever is the officer broken for aiding Count Ammiani's escape, he shall be rewarded by me to the best of my ability. Countess Alessandra, I have anticipated your petition; I hope you may not have to reproach me. Remember that my country was in pieces when you and I declared war. You will not suffer without my suffering tenfold. Perhaps some day

you will do me the favour to sing to me, when there is no chance of interruption. At present it is cruel to detain you.'

Vittoria said simply: 'I thank you, Countess Anna.'

She was led out by Count Karl to where Merthyr awaited her. All wondered at the briefness of a scene that had unexpectedly brought the crisis to many emotions and passions, as the broken waters of the sea beat together and make here or there the wave which is topmost. Anna's grand initiative hung in their memories like the throbbing of a pulse, so hotly their sensations swarmed about it, and so intensely it embraced and led what all were desiring. The duchess kissed Anna, saying:

'That is a noble heart to which you have become reconciled. Though you should never be friends, as I am with one of them, you will esteem her. Do not suppose her to be cold. She is the mother of an unborn little one, and for that little one's sake she follows out every duty; she checks every passion in her bosom. She will spare no sacrifice to save her husband, but she has brought her mind to look at the worst, for fear that a shock should destroy her motherly guard.'

'Really, duchess,' Anna replied, 'these are things for married women to hear'; and she provoked some contempt of her conventional delicacy, at the same time that in her imagination the image of Vittoria struggling to preserve this burden of motherhood against a tragic mischance, completely humiliated and overwhelmed her, as if nature had also come to add to her mortifications.

'I am ready to confess everything I have done, and to be known for what I am,' she said.

'Confess no more than is necessary, but do everything you can; that 's wisest,' returned the duchess.

'Ah; you mean that you have nothing to learn.' Anna shuddered.

'I mean that you are likely to run into the other extreme of disfavouring yourself just now, my child. And,' continued the duchess, 'you have behaved so splendidly that I *won't* think ill of you.'

Before the day darkened, Wilfrid obtained, through Prince Radocky's influence, an order addressed to Major Nagen for the surrender of prisoners into his hands. He and Count Karl started for the Val Camonica on the chance of intercepting the pursuit. These were not much wiser than their guesses and their apprehensions made them; but Weisspriess started on the like errand after an interview with Anna, and he had drawn sufficient intelligence out of sobs, and broken sentences, and torture of her spirit, to understand that if Count Ammiani fell alive or dead into Nagen's hands, Nagen by Anna's scrupulous oath, had a claim on her person and her fortune: and he knew Nagen to be a gambler. As he was now by promotion for service Nagen's superior officer, and a near relative of the Brescian commandant, who would be induced to justify his steps, his object was to reach and arbitrarily place himself over Nagen, as if upon a special mission, and to get the lead of the expedition. For that purpose he struck somewhat higher above the Swiss borders than Karl and Wilfrid, and gained a district in the mountains above the vale, perfectly familiar to him. Obeying directions forwarded to her by Wilfrid, Vittoria left Milan for the Val Camonica no later than the evening; Laura was with her in the carriage; Merthyr took horse after them as soon as he had succeeded in persuading Countess Ammiani to pardon her daughter's last act of wilfulness, and believe that, during the agitation of unnumbered doubts, she ran less peril in the wilds where her husband fled, than in her home.

'I will trust to her idolatrously, as you do,' Countess

Ammiani said; 'and perhaps she has already proved to me that I may.'

Merthyr saw Agostino while riding out of Milan, and was seen by him; but the old man walked onward, looking moodily on the stones, and merely waved his hand behind.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE LAST

There is hard winter overhead in the mountains when Italian Spring walks the mountain-sides with flowers, and hangs deep valley-walls with flowers half fruit; the sources of the rivers above are set about with fangs of ice, while the full flat stream runs to a rose of sunlight. High among the mists and snows were the fugitives of Brescia, and those who for love or pity struggled to save them wandered through the blooming vales, sometimes hearing that they had crossed the frontier into freedom, and as often that they were scattered low in death and captivity. Austria here, Switzerland yonder, and but one depth between to bound across and win calm breathing. But mountain might call to mountain, peak shine to peak; a girdle of steel drove the hunted men back to frosty heights and clouds, the shifting bosom of snows and lightnings. They saw nothing of hands stretched out to succour. They saw a sun that did not warm them, a home of exile inaccessible, crags like an earth gone to skeleton in hungry air; and below, the land of their birth, beautiful, and sown everywhere for them with torture and captivity, or death, the sweetest.

Fifteen men numbered the escape from Brescia. They fought their way twice through passes of the mountains,

and might easily, in their first dash Northward from the South-facing hills, have crossed to the Valtelline and Engadine, but that in their insanity of anguish they meditated another blow, and were readier to march into the plains with the tricolor than to follow any course of flight. When the sun was no longer in their blood they thought of reason and of rest; they voted the expedition to Switzerland, that so they should get round to Rome, and descended from the crags of the Tonale, under which they were drawn to an ambush, suffering three of their party killed, and each man bloody with wounds. The mountain befriended them, and gave them safety, as truth is given by a bitter friend. Among icy crags and mists, where the touch of life grows dull as the nail of a fore-finger, the features of the mountain were stamped on them, and with hunger they lost pride, and with solitude laughter; with endless fleeing they lost the aim of flight; some became desperate, a few craven. Companionship was broken before they parted in three bodies, commanded severally by Colonel Corte, Carlo Ammiani, and Barto Rizzo. Corte reached the plains, masked by the devotion of Carlo's band, who lured the soldiery to a point and drew a chase, while Corte passed the line and pushed on for Switzerland. Carlo told off his cousin Angelo Guidascarpi in the list of those following Corte; but when he fled up to the snows again, he beheld Angelo spectral as the vapour on a jut of rock awaiting him. Barto Rizzo had chosen his own way, none knew whither. Carlo, Angelo, Marco Sana, and a sharply-wounded Brescian lad, conceived the scheme of traversing the South Tyrol mountain-range toward Friuli, whence Venice, the still-breathing republic, might possibly be gained. They carried the boy in turn till his arms drooped long down, and when they knew the soul was out of him they buried him in snow, and thought him happy. It was then that

Marco Sana took his death for an omen, and decided them to turn their heads once more for Switzerland; telling them that the boy, whom he last had carried, uttered 'Rome' with the flying breath. Angelo said that Sana would get to Rome; and Carlo, smiling on Angelo, said they were to die twins though they had been born only cousins. The language they had fallen upon was mystical, scarce intelligible to other than themselves. On a clear morning, with the Swiss peaks in sight, they were condemned by want of food to quit their fastness for the valley.

Vittoria read the faces of the mornings as human creatures have tried to gather the sum of their destinies off changeing surfaces,—fair not meaning fair, nor black black, but either the mask upon the secret of God's terrible will; and to learn it and submit, was the spiritual burden of her motherhood, that the child leaping with her heart might live. Not to hope blindly, in the exceeding anxiousness of her passionate love, nor blindly to fear; not to let her soul fly out among the twisting chances; not to sap her great maternal duty by affecting false stoical serenity:—to nurse her soul's strength, and suckle her womanly weakness with the tears which are poison when repressed; to be at peace with a disastrous world for the sake of the dependent life unborn; by such pure efforts she clung to God. Soft dreams of sacred nuptial tenderness, tragic images, wild pity, were like phantoms encircling her, plucking at her as she went, but they were beneath her feet, and she kept them from lodging between her breasts. The thought that her husband, though he should have perished, was not a life lost if their child lived, sustained her powerfully. It seemed to whisper at times almost as it were Carlo's ghost breathing in her ears: 'On thee!' On her the further duty devolved; and she trod down hope, lest it should build her up

and bring a shock to surprise her fortitude: she put back alarm.

The mountains and the valleys scarce had names for her understanding; they were but a scene where the will of her Maker was at work. Rarely has a soul been so subjected by its own force. She certainly had the image of God in her mind.

Yet when her eyes lingered on any mountain gorge, the fate of her husband sang within it a strange chant, ending in a key that rang sounding through all her being, and seemed to question heaven. This music framed itself; it was still when she looked at the shrouded mountain-tops. A shadow meeting sunlight on the long green slopes aroused it, and it hummed above the tumbling hasty foam, and penetrated hanging depths of foliage, sad-hued rock-clefts, dark green ravines; it became convulsed where the mountain threw forward in a rushing upward line against the sky, there to be severed at the head by cloud. It was silent among the vines.

Most painfully did human voices affect her when she had this music; speech was a scourge to her sense of hearing, and touch distressed her: an edge of purple flame would then unfold the vision of things to her eyes. She had lost memory; and if by hazard unawares one idea was projected by some sudden tumult of her enslaved emotions beyond known and visible circumstances, her intelligence darkened with an oppressive dread like that of zealots of the guilt of impiety.

Thus destitute, her eyes took innumerable pictures sharp as on a brass-plate: torrents, goat-tracks winding up red earth, rocks veiled with water, cottage and children, strings of villagers mounting to the church, one woman kneeling before a wayside cross, her basket at her back, and her child gazing idly by; perched hamlets, rolling pasture-fields, the vast mountain lines. She asked all

that she saw, 'Does he live?' but the life was out of everything, and these shows told of no life, neither of joy nor of grief. She could only distantly connect the appearance of the white-coated soldiery with the source of her trouble. They were no more than figures on a screen that hid the flashing of the sword which renders dumb. She had charity for one who was footsore and sat cherishing his ankle by a village spring, and she fed him, and not until he was far behind, thought that he might have seen the white face of her husband.

Accurate tidings could not be obtained, though the whole course of the vale was full of stories of escapes, conflicts, and captures. Merthyr learnt positively that some fugitives had passed the cordon. He came across Wilfrid and Count Karl, who both verified it in the most sanguine manner. They knew, however, that Major Nagen continued in the mountains. Riding by a bend of the road, Merthyr beheld a man playing among children with one hand and his head down apparently for concealment at his approach. It proved to be Beppo. The man believed that Count Ammiani had fled to Switzerland. Barto Rizzo, he said, was in the mountains still, and Beppo invoked damnation on him, as the author of those lying proclamations which had ruined Brescia. He had got out of the city later than the others, and was seeking to evade the outposts, that he might join his master—'that is, my captain, for I have only one master'; he corrected the slip of his tongue appealingly to Merthyr. His left hand was being continually plucked at by the children while he talked, and after Merthyr had dispersed them with a shower of small coin, he showed the hand, saying, glad of eye, that it had taken a sword-cut intended for Count Ammiani. Merthyr sent him back to mount the carriage, enjoining him severely not to speak.

When Carlo and his companions descended from the

mountains, they entered a village where there was an inn recognized by Angelo as the abode of Jacopo Cruchi. He there revived Carlo's animosity toward Weisspriess by telling the tale of the passage to Meran, and his good reasons for determining to keep guard over the Countess Alessandra all the way. Subsequently Angelo went to Jacopo for food. This he procured, but he was compelled to leave the man behind, and unpaid. It was dark when he left the inn; he had some difficulty in evading a flock of whitecoats, and his retreat from the village was still on the Austrian side. Somewhat about midnight Merthyr reached the inn, heralding the carriage. As Jacopo caught sight of Vittoria's face, he fell with his shoulders straightened against the wall, and cried out loudly that he had betrayed no one, and mentioned Major Weisspriess by name as having held the point of his sword at him and extracted nothing better than a wave of the hand and a lie; in other words, that the fugitives had retired to the Tyrolese mountains, and that he had shammed ignorance of who they were. Merthyr read at a glance that Jacopo had the large swallow and calm digestion for bribes, and getting the fellow alone he laid money in view, out of which, by doubling the sum to make Jacopo correct his first statement, and then by threatening to withdraw it altogether, he gained knowledge of the fact that Angelo Guidascarpi had recently visited the inn, and had started from it South-eastward, and that Major Weisspriess was following on his track. He wrote a line of strong entreaty to Weisspriess, lest that officer should perchance relapse into anger at the taunts of prisoners abhorring him with the hatred of Carlo and Angelo. At the same time he gave Beppo a considerable supply of money, and then sent him off, armed as far as possible to speed Count Ammiani safe across the borders, if a fugitive; or if a prisoner, to ensure the best which

could be hoped for him from an adversary become generous. That evening Vittoria lay with her head on Laura's lap, and the pearly little crescent of her ear in moonlight by the window. So fair and young and still she looked that Merthyr feared for her, and thought of sending her back to Countess Ammiani.

Her first question with the lifting of her eyelids was if he had ceased to trust to her courage.

'No,' said Merthyr; 'there are bounds to human strength; that is all.'

She answered: 'There would be to mine if I had not more than human strength beside me. I bow my head, dearest; it is that. I feel that I cannot break down as long as I know what is passing. Does my husband live?'

'Yes, he lives,' said Merthyr; and she gave him her hand, and went to her bed.

He learnt from Laura that when Beppo mounted the carriage in silence, a fit of ungovernable wild trembling had come on her, broken at intervals by a cry that something was concealed. Laura could give no advice; she looked on Merthyr and Vittoria as two that had an incomprehensible knowledge of the power of one another's natures, and the fiery creature remained passive in perplexity of mind, as soft an attendant as a suffering woman could have.

Merthyr did not sleep, and in the morning Vittoria said to him, 'You want to be active, my friend. Go, and we will wait for you here. I know that I am never deceived by you, and when I see you I know that the truth speaks and bids me be worthy of it. Go up there,' she pointed with shut eyes at the mountains; 'leave me to pray for greater strength. I am among Italians at this inn, and shall spend money here; the poor people love it.' She smiled a little, showing a glimpse of her old charitable humour.

Merthyr counselled Laura that in case of evil tidings during his absence she should reject her feminine ideas of expediency, and believe that she was speaking to a brave soul firmly rooted in the wisdom of heaven.

'Tell her?—she will die,' said Laura, shuddering.

'Get tears from her,' Merthyr rejoined; 'but hide nothing from her for a single instant; keep her in daylight. For God's sake, keep her in daylight.'

'It 's too sharp a task for me.' She repeated that she was incapable of it.

'Ah,' said he, 'look at your Italy, how she weeps! and she has cause. She would die in her grief, if she had no faith in what is to come. I dare say it is not, save in the hearts of one or two, a conscious faith, but it 's real divine strength; and Alessandra Ammiani has it. Do as I bid you. I return in two days.'

Without understanding him, Laura promised that she would do her utmost to obey, and he left her muttering to herself as if she were schooling her lips to speak reluctant words. He started for the mountains with gladdened limbs, taking a guide, who gave his name as Lorenzo, and talked of having been 'out' in the previous year. 'I am a patriot, signore! and not only in opposition to my beast of a wife, I assure you: a downright patriot, I mean.' Merthyr was tempted to discharge him at first, but controlled his English antipathy to babblers, and discovered him to be a serviceable fellow. Toward nightfall they heard shots up a rock-strewn combe of the lower slopes; desultory shots indicating rifle-firing at long range. Darkness made them seek shelter in a pine-hut; starting from which at dawn, Lorenzo ran beating about like a dog over the place where the shots had sounded on the foregoing day; he found a stone spotted with blood. Not far from the stone lay a military glove that bore brown-crimson finger-ends. They were striking

off to a dairy-hut for fresh milk, when out of a crevice of rock overhung by shrubs a man's voice called, and Merthyr climbing up from perch to perch, saw Marco Sana lying at half length, shot through hand and leg. From him Merthyr learnt that Carlo and Angelo had fled higher up; yesterday they had been attacked by Weisspriess, who tried to lure them to surrender by coming forward at the head of his men and offering safety, and 'other gabble,' said Marco. He offered a fair shot at his heart, too, while he stood below a rock that Marco pointed at gloomily as a hope gone for ever; but Carlo would not allow advantage to be taken of even the treacherous simulation of chivalry, and only permitted firing after he had returned to his men. 'I was hit here and here,' said Marco, touching his wounds, as men can hardly avoid doing when speaking of the fresh wound. Merthyr got him on his feet, put money in his pocket, and led him off the big stones painfully. 'They give no quarter,' Marco assured him, and reasoned that it must be so, for they had not taken him prisoner, though they saw him fall, and ran by or in view of him in pursuit of Carlo. By this Merthyr was convinced that Weisspriess meant well. He left his guide in charge of Marco to help him into the Engadine. Greatly to his astonishment, Lorenzo tossed the back of his hand at the offer of money. 'There *shall* be this difference between me and my wife,' he remarked; 'and besides, gracious signore, serving my countrymen for nothing, that 's for love, and the Tedeschi can't punish me for it, so it 's one way of cheating them, the wolves!' Merthyr shook his hand and said, 'Instead of my servant, be my friend'; and Lorenzo made no feeble mouth, but answered, 'Signore, it is much to my honour,' and so they went different ways.

Left to himself Merthyr set step vigorously upward. Information from herdsmen told him that he was an hour

off the foot of one of the passes. He begged them to tell any hunted men who might come within hail that a friend ran seeking them. Farther up, while thinking of the fine nature of that Lorenzo, and the many men like him who could not by the very existence of nobility in their bosoms suffer their country to go through another generation of servitude, his heart bounded immensely, for he heard a shout and his name, and he beheld two figures on a rock near the gorge where the mountain opened to its heights. But they were not Carlo and Angelo. They were Wilfrid and Count Karl, the latter of whom had discerned him through a telescope. They had good news to revive him, however: good at least in the main. Nagen had captured Carlo and Angelo, they believed; but they had left Weisspriess near on Nagen's detachment, and they furnished sound military reasons to show why, if Weisspriess favoured the escape, they should not be present. They supposed that they were not half a mile from the scene in the pass where Nagen was being forcibly deposed from his authority. Merthyr borrowed Count Karl's glass, and went as they directed him round a bluff of the descending hills, that faced the vale, much like a blown and beaten sea-cliff. Wilfrid and Karl were so certain of Count Ammiani's safety, that their only thought was to get under good cover before nightfall—and haply into good quarters, where the three proper requirements of the soldier—meat, wine, and tobacco—might be furnished to them. After an imperative caution that they should not present themselves before the Countess Alessandra, Merthyr sped quickly over the broken ground. How gaily the two young men cheered to him as he hurried on! He met a sort of pedlar turning the blunt-faced mountain-spur, and this man said, 'Yes, sure enough, prisoners had been taken,' and he was not aware of harm having

been done to them; he fancied there was a quarrel between two captains. His plan being always to avoid the military, he had slunk round and away from them as fast as might be. An Austrian common soldier, a good-humoured German, distressed by a fall that had hurt his knee-cap, sat within the gorge, which was very wide at the mouth. Merthyr questioned him, and he, while mending one of his gathered cigar-ends, pointed to a meadow near the beaten track, some distance up the rocks. Whitecoats stood thick on it. Merthyr lifted his telescope and perceived an eager air about the men, though they stood ranged in careless order. He began to mount forthwith, but amazed by a sudden ringing of shot, he stopped, asking himself in horror whether it could be an execution. The shots and the noise increased, until the confusion of a postive mellay reigned above. The fall of the meadow swept to a bold crag right over the pathway, and with a projection that seen sideways made a vulture's head and beak of it. There rolled a corpse down the precipitous wave of green grass on to the crag, where it lodged, face to the sky; sword dangled from sword-knot at one wrist, heels and arms were in the air, and the body caught midway hung poised and motionless. The firing deadened. Then Merthyr drawing nearer beneath the crag, saw one who had life in him slipping down toward the body, and knew the man for Beppo. Beppo knocked his hands together and groaned miserably, but flung himself astride the beak of the crag, and took the body in his arms, sprang down with it, and lay stunned at Merthyr's feet. Merthyr looked on the face of Carlo Ammiani.

EPILOGUE

No uncontested version of the tragedy of Count Ammiani's death passed current in Milan during many years. With time it became disconnected from passion, and took form in a plain narrative. He and Angelo were captured by Major Nagen, and were, as the soldiers of the force subsequently let it be known, roughly threatened with what he termed 'Brescian short credit.' The appearance of Major Weisspriess and his claim to the command created a violent discussion between the two officers. For Nagen, by all military rules, could well contest it. But Weisspriess had any body of the men of the army under his charm, and seeing the ascendancy he gained with them over an unpopular officer, he dared the stroke for the charitable object he had in view. Having established his command, in spite of Nagen's wrathful protests and menaces, he spoke to the prisoners, telling Carlo that for his wife's sake he should be spared, and Angelo that he must expect the fate of a murderer. His address to them was deliberate, and quite courteous: he expressed himself sorry that a gallant gentleman like Angelo Guidascarpi should merit a bloody grave, but so it was. At the same time he entreated Count Ammiani to rely on his determination to save him. Major Nagen did not stand far removed from them. Carlo turned to him and repeated the words of Weisspriess; nor could Angelo restrain his cousin's vehement renunciation of hope and life in doing this. He accused Weisspriess of a long evasion of a brave man's obligation to repair an injury, charged him with cowardice, and requested Major Nagen, as a man of honour, to drag his brother officer to the duel. Nagen then said that Major Weisspriess was his superior in the command, adding that his gallant brother officer had

only of late objected to vindicate his reputation with his sword. Stung finally beyond the control of an irritable temper, Weisspriess walked out of sight of the soldiery with Carlo, to whom, at a special formal request from Weisspriess, Nagen handed his sword. Again he begged Count Ammiani to abstain from fighting; yea, to strike him and disable him, and fly, rather than provoke the skill of his right hand. Carlo demanded his cousin's freedom. It was denied to him, and Carlo claimed his privilege. The witnesses of the duel were Jenna and another young subaltern: both declared it fair according to the laws of honour, when their stupefaction on beholding the proud swordsman of the army stretched lifeless on the brown leaves of the past year left them with power to speak. Thus did Carlo slay his old enemy who would have served as his friend. A shout of rescue was heard before Carlo had yielded up his weapon. Four haggard and desperate men, headed by Barto Rizzo, burst from an ambush on the guard encircling Angelo. There, with one thought of saving his doomed cousin and comrade, Carlo rushed, and not one Italian survived the fight.

An unarmed spectator upon the meadow-borders, Beppo, had but obscure glimpses of scenes shifting like a sky in advance of hurricane winds.

Merthyr delivered the burden of death to Vittoria. Her soul had crossed the darkness of the river of death in that quiet agony preceding the revelation of her Maker's will, and she drew her dead husband to her bosom and kissed him on the eyes and the forehead, not as one who had quite gone away from her, but as one who lay upon another shore whither she would come. The manful friend, ever by her side, saved her by his absolute trust in her fortitude to bear the burden of the great sorrow undeceived, and to walk with it to its last resting-place on earth unobstructed. Clear knowledge of her, the

issue of reverent love, enabled him to read her unequalled strength of nature, and to rely on her fidelity to her highest mortal duty in a conflict with extreme despair. She lived through it as her Italy had lived through the hours which brought her face to face with her dearest in death; and she also on the day, ten years later, when an Emperor and a King stood beneath the vault of the grand Duomo, and the organ and a peal of voices rendered thanks to heaven for liberty, could show the fruit of her devotion in the dark-eyed boy, Carlo Merthyr Ammiani, standing between Merthyr and her, with old blind Agostino's hands upon his head. And then once more, and but for once, her voice was heard in Milan.

THE END

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